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JACK ROLLOCK'S ADVENTURES



"THEY ALL MANAGED TO GET TO THE BOAT SAVE ONE."

JACK ROLLOCK'S ADVENTURES

OR

SKELETON REEF

BY

HUGH ST. LEGER

AUTHOR OF "SOU'WESTER AND SWORD," "HALLOWE'EN AMOT,"
"AN OCEAN OUTLAW," ETC.

Publishers
PARTRIDGE
London

Printed in Great Britain by MACKAYS LTD., Chatham.

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CHAPTER I

SCHOOL

GREAT excitement prevailed amongst the boys who occupied the lower dormitory at St. Chad's School, as they trooped out of evening chapel; for a fight had been arranged to take place that night as soon as the coast should be clear. The combatants were Jack Rollock the hero of this story, and one Tom Hackett, an overgrown blustering bully, a boy who was a terror to all younger and weaker than himself, and a crying, fawning creature to all who were stronger, or in any way in power. He was a fairly clever boy, notwithstanding, and was

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consequently a favourite with his masters, though detested by most of his schoolfellows.

The boys went to their beds with considerable promptitude. An under-master took a turn round the dormitory, saying as he went out—

“Now, boys, no noise to-night! This is the very worst dormitory in the whole school. Hackett, I look to you to keep order.”

“All right, sir,” answered Hackett.

A general titter went round the room as the master shut the door, and his footsteps died away down a long corridor.

Jack Rollock lay in his bed, waiting events. He did not want to fight if it could be avoided; he was much smaller and younger than Hackett, and expected to get a good dressing should he have to tackle this bully. The quarrel had arisen the night before, and would have been settled there and then, had it not been for the arrival of a master at the critical point, which put an end to the proceedings.

There was a small delicate boy, who slept next to Jack Rollock, named Miles. This boy, Hackett was perpetually bullying, and

Jack felt it his duty to protect him if possible. He had tried to reason with the bully, who only tortured the youngster the more on account of Jack championing him, so at last Rollock determined to put a stop to these cruelties by fighting the oppressor, though he had little hope of beating him; yet he thought it probable that by fighting, he would at least make Hackett think twice before molesting young Miles again, as it was not at all creditable for so strong and big a boy to fight with one of Jack's size. Moreover, Hackett wanted to stand well in favour with the masters, and he knew that it would degrade him in their eyes to fight such a boy as Rollock. However, Jack had dared him the night before to touch Miles again, so he felt he was obliged to, in order to keep up his prestige with the other boys, who would think him afraid if he at once ceased from his bullying.

For a time everything remained quiet, Hackett had not said a word, and the boys began to think that he was actually afraid of Jack; this emboldened some who had suffered from his bullying to make remarks.

"I say, Rollock," shouted one insignificant boy

from under his bed-clothes, "you're a regular brick. It reminds me of David and Goliath."

In a moment Hackett was out of bed, and striking a match, lit the gas. Then, pulling the blankets off the bed of the boy who slept next to him, he proceeded to cover up the window. Having settled these preliminaries, he went across to the boy who had spoken. "I'll attend to you, when I've settled with your champion, young Inglis, so make your mind easy." Then walking across to Rollock's bed, he said, "Now come on, and I'll teach you not to interfere with your seniors."

"I don't want to fight, Hackett," said Jack; "you know what our quarrel was about. That is the only thing that will make me tackle you."

Hackett felt emboldened. Now was the time to reassert his authority.

"Then what did you interfere for, you young cub? I'll give you a downright licking, as soon as I've taught your little chum that he need not depend on such a coward as you to protect him."

Pulling off the clothes from the trembling Miles, the bully cried—

"Now, you little milksop, I'm just going to teach you not to go sneaking. I've got

something to impress it on your memory. Do you see this?" and he produced a cane.

"Oh, don't hit me, Hackett! I never sneaked!"

"Oh, didn't you? Well, don't do it again," and the brute brought the cane across the boy's bare legs.

In a moment Jack was out of bed, "Stop it," he cried, "you big blackguard!"

"Do you want some?" inquired Hackett calmly. "If so, here you are," and with that he caught Jack a smart cut across the back.

"Coward!" shouted the boys in chorus. "Why don't you fight him?"

"Come on," said Jack, his blood now well up. "I'm ready for you. Come into the middle of the dormitory."

"Good, Rollock!" shouted everybody as they formed a ring. "Slip into him. We'll back you."

"Well, if you will have a licking," said Hackett, as he surveyed his opponent contemptuously, "don't blame me."

"Never mind the licking. We'll talk of that after. Are you ready?" asked Jack, putting himself into position.

The first round but little damage was done on either side. Jack was very nimble and a good boxer; but he looked so small in comparison with Hackett, that the boys had scarcely any hope of his ultimate victory.

Jack acted only on the defensive, hoping to tire his adversary, but by the time the sixth round had been finished, he was in possession of two good black eyes, and a swollen nose.

"Will you give in?" asked Hackett, who was getting rather puffed, though not in any way hurt.

Jack's answer was to again put himself into position.

"Time!" Again the two went at it, and this round Jack got one in, which somewhat staggered his opponent.

"Good!" shouted the boys. "A few more like that, and he'll go on his knees and beg your pardon."

Hackett was perfectly livid with fury. He lost all control over himself, and made a tremendous blow at Jack, who, cleverly dodging it, planted him one with all his force on the nose. Hackett reeled backwards, and fell with great force, the back of his head coming in contact with the corner of a bed, where he lay stunned.

A wild shout went up from the boys when they saw this great bully vanquished.

"Here, bring some water!" cried one of them. "I believe he's killed. Here's a go!"

At that moment the dormitory door opened, and a master entered.

"Get to your beds, boys. Hallo! what's this?" he continued, catching sight of Hackett's inanimate form lying on the floor, and Jack Rollock, who was covered with blood, trying to restore his opponent to consciousness.

"Is this your doing, Rollock?"

"It was a fair fight, sir," shouted some of the boys.

"Silence! not a word!"

Hackett, after a good sousing with water, opened his eyes. Catching sight of the master, he groaned and breathed heavily. He was lifted on to his bed, and in due course was taken to the infirmary.

As soon as he was gone the boys rushed round Jack, patting him on the back, and congratulating him.

"My word! but there'll be a nice row about his," said one of them. "I vote, if you get into a row, Rollock, we tell the head all about it."

"No," said Jack ; " don't give him the chance to call us sneaks. It doesn't matter when there's no truth in it, but if we told we should deserve the name. I'll take what I get like a man. Any way, he'll think twice before he starts bullying again."

At that moment some one was heard coming along the corridor ; the boys scuttled off to their beds, and began snoring as heavily as if they had been asleep for the last two hours. The door opened, and in came a man-servant, a sort of general school factotum, by name Thomas Hawks.

" Oh, it's only Hawks," said one of the boys.

" What's the row, Hawks ? "

" Master Rollock," said Thomas Hawks, " you are to come along with me. You are to stay in the infirmary until the head-master sends for you to-morrow."

" Never mind, Rollock," shouted the boys, as Jack accompanied Hawks. " You're a brick."

Down the dimly-lit corridor, up a winding flight of stairs, Jack followed his escort, until, safely deposited in a spare ward, the door was locked, and he was left to his own reflections.

CHAPTER II

A FLOGGING

IT was sometime before our hero could sleep. His head was aching, as was also his heart. This would make the third time during the week that he had been hauled before the headmaster. Lately he had done nothing but get into trouble. He seemed to be under an unlucky star, for though he had tried his best to keep out of rows, something was always turning up which landed him into them.

"I don't mind a licking," he said to himself, "but the head said that the next time I was brought before him, he would write to my mother, and it will worry her so dreadfully, though if she knew all she would not blame me." In this unhappy frame of mind he fell asleep.

Jack Rollock was the only son of a naval officer, who had been killed during an encounter with a slave dhow whilst our hero was still but a baby. Consequently his mother had lavished all her affection on him. She was

never tired of telling him long yarns about sea fights and foreign lands, which she had heard from her husband. These tales young Jack listened to with the keenest interest, and inwardly determined to follow the profession of his father, though he never mentioned this resolve to his mother, as he knew it would pain her; and she, poor lady, continued to tell him tales which fired his blood, in happy ignorance of the effect they had upon him. At last the time came for Jack to go to school. It was a bitter wrench for his mother to part with him, but it had to be done, and in due course he was ensconced at St. Chad's. He had certainly done his best whilst there, and for a time got along capitally, but, alas! after a time he got into a form under a master who thought every sign of high spirits in a boy a vice, and Jack soon got into disgrace, and at the time our story opens was thought to be almost incorrigible. He felt that he was being unfairly treated, and his desire to go to sea would come upon him with such intensity, that he often, whilst smarting under a sense of injustice, made up his mind to run away, and indeed was only kept from such a foolish course

by the thoughts of how it would hurt his mother were he to do so.

The ringing of the school-bell roused him from a somewhat disturbed slumber. It sounded indistinct, and it was some minutes before he realised where he was; but soon the events of the preceding night rushed upon him. He jumped out of bed and made straight for a looking-glass. He gave vent to a long whistle as he surveyed his countenance. Two black eyes, a swollen nose, and an interview with the head-master! "Here's a go! I wonder how Hackett looks!" he said aloud as he prepared to make his toilet. "I hope I didn't hurt him badly. Dormitories are horrid places for a scrimmage; if he wants any more I'll fight out in the fives court—much the best place."

He had scarcely finished dressing when the door was unlocked, and the kindly old school nurse, Mrs. Binder, entered.

"Well, bless me, Master Rollock!" she said, "you do look horrid. To think that you should fight so savage. I wouldn't have thought it of you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, Nurse, perhaps I ought, but Hackett is quite big enough to look after himself. I

hope he's not much hurt ; I didn't mean him to knock his head against the bed, you know,"

"That I'm sure you didn't, Master Rollock, and I admires you for it. I knows what Master Hackett is. Many of the little boys have told me of his barbarities, and if it weren't that I makes a rule of never interfering, I should have reported him long since. But as for him, there ain't much the matter, though he makes out he's terrible hurt. I've got some nice breakfast for you in my room, then you can tell me all about it."

"That's stunning, Nurse. Nothing like a good breakfast when one's got to go and see the head! It fortifies you against corporal chastisement, as he calls it, doesn't it?"

"Can't say, my dear boy ; I was a girl, you know, so was not treated so brutally as you are, but I hope he won't go and flog you, for I know you weren't in the wrong. How did it all happen?"

"Oh! it was only a little quarrel we had to settle between ourselves. It's all over now, and I dare say we'll soon be friends."

"That I'm sure you won't, for a nastier dispositioned boy than Master Hackett I never

did come across. However, as you won't tell me, it doesn't matter, for I'll soon hear from the other boys. I know most things, Master Rollock, though I keeps a still tongue."

Jack let the kind old lady keep on talking whilst he polished off a good breakfast.

"Now I'm ready for anything that may happen, Nurse, thanks to your breakfast. Hallo! there goes the chapel bell; I suppose I'll be wanted directly. I look a sight to go into chapel, don't I? I shouldn't wonder if he lets me off. No, here comes some one to escort me. It's like going to execution."

At that moment the door opened, and in came Stephens, the captain of the school.

"Well, young Rollock! You seem to have given Hackett what he deserved; but I'm afraid you'll get a licking from the head. You've to go to his study immediately after chapel."

"Am I to come into chapel?"

"Yes, to sit with me in the end seat. It's a pity you didn't do something to get the black out of your eyes. You look perfectly disgraceful."

"He ought to be proud of them, Master Stephens. I'm sure he got them in defending a small boy from a brute, and I call it a shame

if he is punished," said the old nurse. "There, good-bye, laddie, and if you get flogged, up and tell all about it."

"Good-bye, Nursie. It isn't the first time I've had a licking. I'm getting pretty tough now."

As the boys came into chapel they took side glances at Jack as he sat with Stephens in what was usually called the "condemned cell," as all boys who had committed serious offences were put into the end seat until they had received their punishment. As soon as the service was over Jack was conducted to the door of the head-master's study.

"Stay here," said Stephens. "I'll go and see if he's ready to see you."

Jack waited with a somewhat trembling heart whilst Stephens went in. The head-master was a heavy flogger, and Jack expected no mercy, as he knew his form master would have painted him in the blackest colours, and lauded Hackett up to the skies. The door opened and Stephens reappeared.

"Come with me," he said gently.

As soon as they had got clear of the head-master's room he continued, "Look here, young Rollock, he's going to give you a public thrash-

ing. I know all about this row. If I were you I would tell him the whole affair from beginning to end. You have plenty of evidence to back you up."

"I never sneak, Stephens," answered Jack. "He ought to find things out for himself."

"Well, as you please. I'm very sorry for you, but I can't help you."

By this time they had arrived at the door of the big schoolroom, where they halted and awaited the arrival of the head-master.

He was not long in coming, arrayed in cap and gown, his college cap pushed rather to the back of his head, a habit he had when in a bad temper. He came strutting along the passage, Stephens opening the door for him.

"Bring the boy in," he said, without casting a glance at the culprit.

There was a deadly silence in the schoolroom as the head-master took up his position on a dais, Jack and Stephens standing close by. After a preliminary cough he began.

"Boys, I have a most painful duty to perform, that of flogging in public one of your number; a thing I only do when an offence is of the gravest kind. This boy (pointing to

Jack with his cane) has committed an offence not only against discipline, but one of extraordinary brutality. A hard-working, trustworthy boy is placed in charge of a dormitory. He is specially warned to keep his juniors in order; in the execution of this high duty he is brutally attacked by this lazy, incorrigible boy, is rendered insensible, and a bright intellect and clear judgment is in danger of being marred."

Here a buzz of disapproval came from the boys in Jack's form.

"Silence, boys! I see his conduct is contagious; nevertheless, I will take a merciful view of his case. I will not expel him, though he thoroughly deserves it. I will deal kindly with him, in the hope that he may reform, and that the flogging which I am about to administer will be a life-long warning to him, and to others who think it a fine thing to set authority at defiance."

"Please, sir," came a feeble voice from the end of the room, "may I speak?"

"Silence!"

It was young Miles, who was overcoming his natural shyness at the thought of his protector's danger, and was about to speak up;

but the voice of the head-master subdued him, and he relapsed into silence.

We will not go into the details of the flogging. Suffice it to say that Jack bore the twelve cuts which were administered without a groan, though he nearly bit his lip through in his efforts not to cry out. He looked very pale, and, in spite of his black eyes, handsome, when he was once more set at liberty.

"Shall I take him to the infirmary, sir?" inquired Stephens.

"No, certainly not! Let him rejoin his form. Now, who is the boy who wanted to speak?"

Young Miles was brought up trembling to the dais.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked the head-master.

"Please, sir, it wasn't his fault," stammered the unfortunate youth.

"Oh, indeed! I heard that you were the primary cause of the disturbance. I was about to let you off on account of your youth, and thinking you to be under the influence of that bad boy, but I see I must make an example of you also. Hold out your hand," and poor little Miles received four cuts for his pains.

Alas! how many a boy's career in life has been spoilt through the indiscretion of a master. Thank God, things are better now. But the sea, the army, and the colonies all have a nucleus of men, whose career in life has been marred by an injudicious or unjust flogging, probably from men who at the time thought they were doing their duty.

Jack took his place in his form, not the light-hearted, merry, forgiving lad that he had been but a short time before, but a boy who, suffering from an injustice, was filled with a demon of revenge. A good cry would probably have relieved him, but he was too proud for that, and he sat gloomily doing no work, and only thinking how he could be revenged on Hackett, the head-master, and also on the master of his form, whom he blamed most of all, for it must have been he who gave him such a bad character and Hackett such a good one. Time flew on unheeded by him until the morning lessons were over, and the boys ran out to the playground. He was following on sullenly in the hope of getting to some secluded spot, where he could indulge in the evil thoughts which assailed him, but he was not allowed to

be by himself, for the boys gathered round him.

"Never mind, Rollock," they said, "you're a regular brick; you took that licking like a man. We'll pay that brute Hackett out as soon as he is better. Cheer up, old chap!" and with such like expressions the boys tried to comfort him, but Jack pushed his way through them, and was soon alone in a quiet nook. Hidden from the sight of his school-fellows, he lay on the grass, and gave way to a flood of tears. They were hot bitter tears, but they somewhat relieved him. Jumping up, he picked up a large stone and threw it against a tree.

"There," he cried aloud, "I wish that was my fist, Hackett, and the tree your head."

"Rollock," said a voice close beside him, "I should hardly have expected a plucky boy like you to be so spiteful."

Jack looked round. He was face to face with one of the masters, the one he liked best out of the whole staff. He felt ashamed.

"Well, sir," he said, "it's all so beastly. I must do something. I hate everybody!"

"Send those feelings to the winds, my boy. They are not worthy of you. I've heard a good

deal about your fight, and I came to shake hands with you. I'll try and explain matters to the head-master."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, as he shook the master's hand; "but don't say anything about it. I've made up my mind what to do."

"Nothing desperate, I hope? No stone throwing?"

Jack blushed with shame. "No, sir; I'll soon get over all ideas of vengeance—only I was so miserable."

These two had a good long talk, with the result that Jack returned to a better frame of mind, and walked back to join his school-fellows with a firm determination to think no more about the affair, and shake hands with Hackett as soon as he was well again. But, alas! that afternoon all his good resolutions were knocked on the head. He was put on in a lesson which he had not prepared, and knowing little or nothing about it, was punished. He had meant to get up early in the morning and prepare it, but the events of the preceding night had prevented him.

"It's no good trying; I can't get on, so I'll go off," he said to himself. "Hurrah for the sea! I'll be a sailor!"

CHAPTER III

A RUNAWAY

JACK ROLLOCK was a boy of a resourceful and energetic character. No sooner did he thoroughly determine on a line of action than he acted on it, and nothing would turn him from it. He had made up his mind to run away, so he at once began to make his plans.

He found there was a train to London at midnight, which would enable him to catch another to his own home at 4.30, arriving before six in the morning.

"That's capital," he thought, as he put his time-table away. "I shall be able to see my mother, and explain everything to her before they know here that I am absent. Now as to money—ten shillings and sixpence all told; barely a fare. I must borrow some from young Miles; I know he's got some. I shall have to take a cab, and I mustn't seem short, otherwise it will excite suspicion."

Seeking out Miles, he asked him if he would lend him ten shillings.

"I'll send it to you to-morrow night," he said, forgetting his secret.

"Send it to me!" answered Miles; "what do you mean? You're not going away, are you?"

"Oh, what a duffer I am! I've let the cat out of the bag; but you're a trustworthy chap. Look here! promise me that you won't say anything about it, and I'll tell you something."

"Of course I won't say a word if you don't wish it. But what are you going to do?"

"Why, don't you see, I'm always in trouble and can never get on here, so I'm going to run away and go to sea?"

"O Jack! don't do that," said young Miles; "please don't do that?"

"Yes, I've made up my mind, and nothing will stop me. My father was a sailor, and I'm going to be one too."

"But think of your mother. Just fancy leaving her without saying good-bye."

Jack laughed. "Oh, make your mind easy, Miles! I'm going home first. I'm not such a brute as all that." He then disclosed to young Miles his plans. "I shall want you to help me, for I shall have to get out of the window by sheets, and I will want you to haul them in again after I am gone."

"I'll do anything for you, Jack ; but do think quietly over it just for a night. I feel that it is all my fault."

"Not it ; you can't help it. All I want is that you should say nothing about it to anybody, and lend me a hand."

"I'll do all you want, but I do wish you would take time to consider."

"If I considered for a month it would not alter my determination. So make your mind easy. I always meant to be a sailor, and I'm going to be."

Just then the evening chapel bell rang. The boys formed into a line and marched in.

Jack felt rather sentimental, as he thought this would be the last service he would ever attend in St. Chad's Chapel. He had not always disliked the school ; indeed, it was only within the last two terms that he had been made so miserable. But he did not repent of his determination ; he even prayed God to prosper him.

Just as the boys came out a sudden squall of wind shook all the windows and slammed the doors of the old school.

"That's the style," thought Jack. "It's Neptune sent to welcome one of his sons."

He often thought of that squall in after life,

whilst fighting with the elements. It many a time appeared to him as if it had come as a warning to him that he would have to contend with storm and tempest, fire and foe, and to pause and consider ere he took a final step. But luckily youth does not notice such warnings, otherwise we should have lacked many of the sailors who have made our beloved country mistress of the seas. This puff of wind only increased Jack's longing to be on the briny, going through perils and toils as so many famous men had done in times past.

When Jack got into the dormitory the boys crowded round him, and lifting him shoulder high carried him round.

"That's very nice," he cried, "and thanks for it, but I'm a bit sore with my licking, so wait until another time."

"Yes," they shouted, "we'll wait until Hackett comes back; won't it rile him, though? we don't expect he'll want to fight any more."

Jack was anxious for every one to get to sleep sharp, so that he and Miles might carry out their plans without exciting suspicion. Though he felt sure that all the boys might be trusted, yet he preferred to keep his arrangements secret.

As soon as everything was quiet, Jack went across to Miles's bed.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

"Yes. I say, don't go to-night."

"I mean to, so don't waste words about it. Here's a candle. Now we'll set to work to make a rope."

Screening the light by placing it in an empty basin, the boys set to work to knot sheets and counterpanes together. They took those off Hackett's unoccupied bed first, and then their own.

"I think that will be long enough," said Jack, as he knotted the last sheet, "though it's a good forty feet from the ground. Let me see, six sheets and three counterpanes. Yes, that will do, allowing even for the knots; and you must take a turn round the bed, for I don't want to drop."

There was a window at the head of Miles's bed which it was proposed to utilise as a means of exit.

"Let me see," said Jack, looking at his watch; "it's only half-past ten. I mustn't start before a quarter-past eleven, as I don't want to be seen hanging about the station or the town. We'll just drop the sheets out of

the window to see that they are long enough, then haul them in and wait until it's time."

The window was noiselessly opened and the curious rope lowered.

"Just the ticket," whispered Jack; "reaches within about three feet of the ground, as near as I can see. Listen!"

A step was heard coming along the corridor. The boys only just had time to pull the window to as close as it would come (for it would not shut, as they had to leave the sheets hanging), blow out the light, and jump into bed, when the door opened and a master entered. He stood looking in at the door.

"Anybody awake?" he asked.

No answer.

"I'm sure some of you are, for I saw a light under the doorway. Don't let me see it again," and with this remark he retired.

As soon as the noise of his footsteps had died away, Jack jumped out of bed, and rolling his blanket against the foot of the door, relit his candle.

"That will prevent him from noticing any light. Now, then, I'm off, whilst the coast is clear. Mind, Miles, all you've got to do is to draw up the sheets as soon as I am safely on

the ground, put them in their places, go to sleep, and forget all about it by the morning. I'll just put a bolster in my bed, in case any one comes round, and then they won't notice that I am absent."

"I wish you would stay. Suppose these sheets came untied and you fell, you would be killed. Nothing could save you."

"No fear of that. I know how to tie knots. Good-bye, Miles; don't get yourself into a row by talking about this. I'll write to you as soon as I get home."

"Good-bye," whispered Miles, as Jack climbed into the window-sill and took a last look at the fastenings of the sheets round the bed preparatory to climbing out.

"Good-bye, Miles! God bless you! I'll always write to you," and with these words he began his perilous descent.

Young Miles dared not look. He knelt on his bed, and prayed and shuddered as he felt the strain on the sheets. Presently it slackened, and he heard Jack give a low whistle, which told him he had reached the ground in safety. Miles pulled up the improvised rope as fast as he could, placed the sheets on the beds, blew out the candle, and went off into a sleep.

dreaming of his chum going through many adventures, finally getting caught, and being brought back to St. Chad's to be punished.

As soon as Jack felt the night air whistling round and himself dangling a good forty feet in the air, he nearly yelled with joy, but he had to be discreet, as this was only the beginning of his adventure, and he had no wish to be ignominiously brought back; so he descended to the ground as quickly as possible, and having given Miles the signal to haul up and seen it obeyed, he ran down to the bottom of the playground as hard as he could, then scaling a wall, made his way cautiously through the head-master's garden into the main road. Though he had got so far unmolested, he had seen something which caused him a good deal of anxiety, namely, that the head-master's carriage was out. He had been able to get a view of the stables. There was a light burning in them, but no horse and no carriage.

"Here's a go! I wonder where he's gone. All the chaps say he can see in the dark. I hope I shan't run against him."

It was about a mile and a half from St. Chad's School to the railway station, and the direct route lay through the main street of the

town. Jack deemed it wiser to avoid this. He had plenty of time, and he thought that by making a *détour* he would be less likely to meet any one who might recognise him. He devoutly wished himself safely in the train. Once in London, he felt that he would be sure to reach home before being captured.

It did not take him long to reach the station. He was very early. The gas was turned low, and the booking offices till shut, so he whiled away the time by walking up and down the platform. Presently he heard the slamming of a door, and the booking clerk came along the platform swinging a bunch of keys and whistling loudly. Jack hastened to the office, and arrived just as the clerk opened the little pigeon-hole.

"Third single, London."

The clerk eyed him rather suspiciously, and as he handed him the ticket, said—

"No bad news to call you home, sir, I hope?"

"No," answered Jack, turning crimson.

"Going for a short holiday, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, for a few days."

"There, I've given you the wrong change, I think; do you mind letting me count it again?"

"Not at all," answered Jack, as he handed back the money. At that moment there was a sound of wheels, and a carriage drove up.

Jack trembled, for he recognised it as the head-master's, and seated on the box was Thomas Hawks preparing to descend.

"I say, look sharp with that change; here's the head-master's carriage. I must see the coachman before the train comes in."

"Here you are, sir," said the clerk; "sorry to have kept you waiting; it's all right, now."

Jack picked up his change. He did indeed see the coachman, for he had never taken his eyes off him, though that worthy had not seen him.

"Here's a go," he mused as he hastened away to the farther end of the platform. "The head must be coming by this train; I must keep well out of sight. How unfortunate!"

In a few minutes the train was signalled. Jack stood with beating heart waiting its arrival. It was an express, and only stopped about two minutes. This would not give him much time. He stood behind a pillar as the train dashed into the station.

"Now for it," he murmured, as he made for

a carriage. "Oh, confound it! Third class is right forward; I'll have to run the whole length of the platform."

He took a hasty glance round, but could not see the head-master. Hoping that something had prevented him from coming, he made his way towards a carriage. He was just about to enter, when he heard a lady's voice, which he at once recognised as that of the head-master's wife, saying in an excited tone—

"My dear, I'm sure I saw one of our boys get into the train."

"Nonsense, my dear! how could any of the boys be out at this time of night? However, I'll look! Which carriage?"

Jack found the compartment unoccupied save for a bundle of wraps on the seat. Seizing hold of one he went to the farther corner, and throwing it over him, stretched himself out as if asleep. Hardly had he done this when he heard the lady's voice saying, "This was the carriage."

Jack trembled, and snored.

"There's no boy in here," said the head-master. "You must be mistaken."

"I'm sure I'm not. See who it is asleep in the corner."

The guard whistled, "Now then, sir, are you going on?"

"No, but I'm looking for a boy who was seen——"

"No time for that, sir; we're late now."

At that moment a man rushed up, and pushing the head-master unceremoniously on one side, jumped into the carriage just as the train moved off. The door was banged to, and Jack breathed again.

"Hallo, where's my rug?" said the fellow-passenger. Then catching sight of Jack, "Here, sir, I beg your pardon, but I think you've got my rug, or one very much like it."

"It's all right," answered Jack, "it's yours. Here you are," and there and then, overcome with mirth at the way he had eluded capture, burst into a peal of laughter.

"You young scoundrel, what are you laughing at? You take my rug, and then, instead of apologising, laugh in my face. What do you mean by it?"

Jack took a look at his companion. He was a man of about thirty or thereabouts, sunburnt, and of a decidedly nautical appearance. "He's all right," he thought, "I'll tell him the whole yarn."

"I am awfully sorry, sir, but I can't help

laughing at the way you pushed that gentleman aside."

"That's all very funny, no doubt, but what were you doing with my rug?"

"I'll tell you if you'll promise not to tell anybody until after eight o'clock to-morrow morning, or rather this morning, for it's past midnight now."

"Confound the boy! he nails my rug, and then wants to extract a promise from me not to say anything about it. I wonder what mischief he's up to. I certainly won't promise you anything of the kind, not until you tell me the yarn."

"Are you a sailor?" inquired Jack.

"I may be, but what's that to do with you?"

"Oh, I can see you are, so I don't mind trusting you."

"Thank you, boy, you're very kind; but let's hear why you took my rug, or I'll pull your ears."

"Well, promise me not to say anything about it till—well, six?"

"All right! Let's have it."

"Not till six?"

"Confound the boy. Very well, not till six. That's not very long."

"The gentleman you pushed on one side,"

said Jack, "was my head-master, and I am a runaway school-boy."

"I could have sworn it, you young rascal I'll give you up to the guard to take back as soon as the train arrives."

"Not till six," said Jack; "you promised."

"Ah! so I did, but what are you going to do? Tell me that, and then I'll consider."

"I'll tell you all about it if you stick to your promise."

"All right, I suppose I must."

Jack soon gave an outline of the events of the preceding days and so enlisted the sympathy of his companion that he promised to assist him in the event of the head-master having telegraphed to the station authorities to keep a look-out.

"I'll tell you what it is, sonny, we'll have to change tickets, and you must take that collar off, and put on a muffler. I've got one in my bag. Just do as I tell you, and you'll be all right."

Jack was soon arrayed in a seal-skin cap, a sailor's muffler, and a guernsey frock, which was made to fit by putting it over his jacket.

"That will do," said his companion; "you look like a fisher-boy. Now we'll change

tickets, and nobody will interfere with you. Only keep those white hands of yours out of sight."

Jack was delighted with his transformation, and he and his companion, who proved to be a sailor, passed a pleasant time until the train stopped at a station for the tickets to be taken.

"Now then, pretend to be asleep, and leave the rest to me, sonny. I'll see you clear."

"Tickets, sir!" said the collector.

Jack's companion gave his up, at the same time giving Jack a shake.

"Here, wake up. Where's your ticket?"

Jack grunted, fumbled about in a sleepy manner for a time, and then produced the ticket.

"You got in at St. Chad's, sir?" said the collector.

"Yes, can't you see?"

"Did you see a school-boy get in?"

"No."

"Funny thing. We've received a telegram to look out for a runaway boy, but yours appears to be the only ticket from there."

"I didn't see anybody get in. This young man was lying down on the seat just as he is now when I entered."

"They must have made a mistake, sir ; sorry to trouble you," and the man shut the door.

"Now keep still, sonny, till the train moves off, and then you'll be all right," said Jack's friend.

It was but a few minutes' run into the station now. "Shall I change?" asked Jack.

"No, I'm going to St. Pancras," answered his companion. "We'll take a four-wheeler, and you can get into your own togs as we go along ; I'll see you safe now, though I don't know that I'm acting right."

At last our hero was safely seated in the train which would take him to his own home. Having taken a hearty farewell of his sailor friend, who had proved such a help, the train steamed off, and by six o'clock in the morning he was standing outside the door of his mother's house, wondering whether he should ring them up, or wait until the servant came down. After a few minutes' consideration, he determined to wait, so as not to alarm his mother by his sudden and unlooked-for arrival.

CHAPTER IV

QUARANTINE ISLAND

THREE years after the events recorded in our last chapter, Jack Rollock was laying aloft to furl the main-royal of the ship *White Rose*, on which he was an apprentice.

The vessel was passing between the headlands which are at the entrance of Port Lyttelton, New Zealand.

"Give it a harbour stow, my lad," shouted the mate, who was standing on the poop. "Here, Verdon, jump aloft and lend him a hand, and tell him to pass the gaskets close."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered a bright, good-looking youth, who was also an apprentice, as he sprang on the main sheer pole, and made his way aloft with the nimbleness of a monkey.

"A harbour stow, Jack," he said, as he climbed on to the yard. "I say, this is a fine-looking place. But where's the town?"

"Round the bend, so one of the seamen who has been here about a dozen times told me."

"Main-royal," shouted the mate.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Furl the top-gallant sail before you come down."

"Ay, ay, sir."

There was a rattle of blocks and ropes, and the top-gallant yard was lowered on the cap, leaving the sail flapping and banging about until snugged by the buntlines and leachlines.

"Hallo!" said Jack to his companion, as they got on to the yard. "Why, he's not going in. He's going to bring up right out here. We're not even in sight of the town."

The vessel had but little way, most of the yards having been lowered and the sails clewed up.

"Let go the anchor!"

There was a loud splash and a roar of chain as the cable rushed through the hawse-pipe, and the *White Rose* swung round slowly to the stream and came to a standstill. The next minute the yards were alive with men as they came aloft to stow the sails.

All hands worked with a will, as it was getting late in the afternoon, and they soon had the sails furled, the decks cleared up, and went below to their tea.

The skipper went ashore in a steam-launch with the ship's agents, but before leaving the vessel he gave the mate orders that no one was to be allowed ashore until he returned. This seemed a rather unnecessary order, as the ship was lying in the outer harbour, opposite the quarantine station, and more than a mile from the town landing-stage.

"I say, Jack," said Verdon, when the boys got into the apprentices' berth, "the gig is lying astern. Will you come with me, and we'll pull over to the quarantine island. It will be fine sport. One of the seamen told me there were such a lot of rabbits that you could get as many as you could carry away in five minutes, just by knocking them on the head with a stick."

"I heard the skipper tell the mate that no one was to go ashore, and there would be a fine old row if we were caught," answered Jack.

"Oh, he only meant that no one was to go into the town. Why, we can't do any harm just pulling across to that island; and think of the rabbits!"

"It would be sport. Yes—I don't suppose there's any harm in it. I'll come; only we'll

have to look sharp and start, so as to get back before they set an anchor watch."

"I'm ready. The mate's down at tea, so come on ; now's the time."

There was nobody about the decks, so the two boys went silently aft. Hauling the gig close under the counter, Jack climbed over the taffrail and slid down the painter into the boat.

"Are the oars in her?" inquired Verdon.

"Yes, there are two ; that is enough. Come on, it's nearly dark. Some one will be up in a minute to hoist the riding light."

"Half a jiffy—I must get a line to come down by ; hold on to the rudder chains whilst I let go the painter."

"Ay, ay !"

In a few seconds Harry Verdon was safely in the boat, and the two boys pulled towards the island, which was now barely visible in the gathering gloom of night.

"I say," said Jack, "we haven't got a stick to knock the rabbits over with."

"Oh, the boat-hook and tiller will do. If the mate finds out we're gone, we can easily propitiate him by giving him a few rabbits."

"He's all right. He'll only growl a little."

The boat soon reached the island, and the boys jumping ashore hauled her up on the beach, and then began to explore. The delight experienced by sailors on first landing after being pent up on board a ship during a long passage, must be much the same as a horse feels when turned out to grass. At least the gyrations of both are similar.

Jack and Harry, as soon as they had got over the first excitement of being once more on *terra firma*, armed themselves with boat-hook and tiller, and set out in search of the rabbits.

The island was very small—in fact, at low tide it was no island at all, being joined to the mainland by a ledge of rocks which were high and dry even when the tide was at half-ebb. Near the centre was a long row of wooden buildings. This was the quarantine station, where immigrants and passengers are landed in the event of their coming from an infected port.

“Well, Jack,” said Verdon, after they had walked a short distance, “I wonder where the rabbits are?”

“They must be on the mainland, Harry, for they wouldn’t stand much chance here when a

ship-load of immigrants were landed. Let's go and explore the station."

They stole cautiously towards the buildings, for they did not want to disturb the keeper, as they had no business ashore; but as they neared the place the dogs began to bark furiously. They were about to beat a retreat, when a gruff voice hailed them—

"Hallo! I see you" (which could not be true, as it was pitch dark). "Who are you? What do you want?"

They neither of them answered.

"If you don't come here, I'll set the dogs on you, and I'll warrant you'll speak sharp enough then."

"All right, old chap," shouted Jack, "we're only having a look round."

"A nice time to look round, I must say. Come up here into the light."

The boys approached the speaker, guided by his voice, for they could not see him.

"Boys, drat them! They're far more trouble than any amount of men. Come up to the hut."

They followed the man into a snug room, where a bright fire was burning.

"Oh, I see," he said, as they got into the

light, "you belong to that ship that came in this afternoon."

"Yes, we just came ashore to see if we could find any rabbits. We're tired of salt junk."

"Rabbits! There ain't no rabbits on this island, though there be thousands on the one down the harbour. But rabbits or no rabbits, you ain't got no business ashore here, so I tells you, and I'll have to get you locked up."

"That's all right, guvnor; we've done no harm. We'll go straight aboard again."

"Well, I suppose boys will be boys. I was one myself once, though you wouldn't think it, would you?"

"No, you're a bit grizzled," said Harry.

"Yes, and so would you be, if you had been at sea as long as I have. But I mustn't growl—I've got a good berth now. What's the news from home. How long were you coming out?"

"About three months and a half on the passage, so I suppose you have later news than we have."

"I daresay I have, but it does me good to see youngsters fresh from the old country. Here, sit down, and have a bit of supper with me."

The boys soon made themselves comfortable, and polished off a substantial meal, sitting by the cosy fire, whilst the old chap told them long yarns.

"I say," said Jack, "this is jolly comfortable, but it must be close on eight bells. We must be getting aboard. Hallo, it's raining, and coming on to blow too."

They had not noticed that the wind had increased as they sat chatting, and it was now blowing pretty stiff. The man opened the door and looked out, and a rush of wind came in, extinguishing the candles.

"You'll have a trouble to get off to your ship, my lads," he said, as he relit the lights, and looked at his glass. "Yes, we're in for a strong blow, I think. You had better stay here for the night."

"We can't do that," said the boys together. "We'll get into a nice row as it is."

"Well, if you must go, you must; but you'll have a rare job to get off. The tide is running out, and the breeze is blowing right down the harbour, so you must pull well to windward, and then drop down on the vessel, otherwise you'll never fetch her."

"All right, we'll get to her somehow, never fear. Thanks for your supper ; we'll come and see you again," said Jack.

"I'll come down to the boat with you, as you don't know the way, or you'll be breaking your shins over the rocks."

"No, don't trouble ; it's raining like old boots. We've got to get wet, but there's no occasion for you to. I know exactly where the boat is."

"Well, if you think you can find the way perhaps I won't come, for my rheumatism has been bad lately."

"Solon," shouted the boys as they sallied forth from the cosy room into the dark blustering night. "If you come and see us aboard, we'll give you a good spread."

"Solon, lads! don't forget to pull well to windward."

"Ay, ay!"

"I say," said Verdon, "we'll get into a nice row for this, and we'll have a job to get off. Just fancy having to pull to windward with this breeze, and the tide against us too. Why, we shan't get aboard till four bells."

By this time they had arrived at the beach.

"My stars," shouted Jack, "the boat's adrift

"We are only just in time. There she is, a good five fathoms out. Can you see her?"

"Yes, I can just make her out, but how are we going to get her?"

"There's only one way. I shall have to wade or swim out. What fools we were not to make the painter fast! I forgot all about the tide."

Jack threw off his coat, pulled his belt tightly round his waist, and waded into the dark cold water. He was up to his neck before he was able to secure the painter.

"Hurrah, I've got her!" he shouted as he made his way ashore. "Lor! it is cold. Give me my coat, and let's push off as soon as possible."

The anchor light hanging in the fore rigging of the *White Rose* was plainly visible to the boys as they shoved their boat off from the friendly shelter of the island. They pulled up the harbour for about a quarter of an hour, but found they made little progress, the riding light seeming all the time abreast of them.

"Give way, Harry," shouted Jack; "we're hardly moving. We'll never get aboard at this rate."

Harry gave a vigorous pull with his oar, but unfortunately caught a crab, and fell back into the bottom of the boat. At that moment a terrific squall of rain and wind swept down on them, and when he picked himself up again he found the oar had slipped out of the rowlock, and they were practically adrift.

"Pull hard," shouted Jack, "we're going to leeward at the rate of knots."

"I can't, my oar is gone!"

"Gone!"

The rain had hidden the vessel's light from the boys, but the squall was of short duration, and it was soon visible again.

"Look at the light," shouted Jack, "we're drifting out as hard as we can go. I'll try and scull her."

Jumping up he went into the stern-sheets and putting his oar over tried to scull, but he had had very little practice at this work, and consequently did but little good. The boat rapidly drifted out towards the heads, the vessel's light soon faded from view, and within an hour the little boat was heaving about on the broad bosom of the great South Pacific.

CHAPTER V

ADRIFF

WHEN they found themselves outside the heads the two boys sat for some time in silence, a sense of utter despair creeping over them. Jack remained in the stern-sheets, doing his best to keep the boat before the wind by the aid of his oar. Fortunately the wind did not increase. It was really not blowing more than a stiff top-gallant sail breeze with a lively sea, but in a small boat the seas which, from the deck of a ship, would have been comparatively nothing, looked tremendous, and the wind caused showers of spray to fly over the boat.

Jack was the first to speak. "I say, Harry," he said, "I wish we had taken the old man's advice, and stayed on the island."

"It's no good crying over spilt milk, Jack. We can only weather it out to-night. We're pretty sure to be picked up in the daylight. Let me take a spell at that oar."

"No, I've just got the gauge of the seas, and I had better stick where I am."

"All right."

For over two long weary hours neither spoke. Both were drenched through and through, and the incessant rain and sprays made baling necessary.

"I wonder what the time is," suddenly remarked Verdon.

"Breakfast-time, I should think, judging from the way I feel internally. Think of hot coffee and——" At that moment the boat shipped a sea, the first that she had.

"Bale as hard as you can, Harry, or she'll go down. Don't talk; I can't steer if you do."

Hour after hour passed wearily on. The night seemed interminable; but the longest lane must have an end, and at last a faint show of light appeared in the east.

"Thank God! Daylight at last," said Jack.

The morning broke. A strong wind, a tumbling, spiteful sea, and a cold driving rain.

"Now I'll take a spell at that oar, Jack. What do you say?"

"All right, but be very careful at first. You'll soon get the gauge. Can you see any land?"

"No, it's far too misty ; but we can't be very far out."

"I suppose we'll fall in with some craft before long. There are sure to be plenty of coasters about. Keep her dead before it. Harry," said Jack, as he relinquished the oar, "that's the longest trick at the wheel I've ever had, or ever want."

He looked anxiously round ; there was not a sign of any land or of a vessel.

"I say, Harry, are you hungry?"

"Hungry? I could eat my boots!"

The day wore on. Rain and wind remained the same. Nothing came in sight, and the boys grew weary of watching the fields of white-crested waves which surrounded them. They felt the want of food more than drink, for they got a certain amount of water by letting the rain drive in their faces, and licking their lips as it trickled over their mouths.

"I wish the breeze would die away," said Verdon. "We're getting farther from the land all the time."

"Yes, but still we must be in the track of vessels ; we're sure to be picked up sooner or later, dead or alive."

"That's comforting, Jack. O God, I am hungry!"

This exclamation came out with such force that it would have startled Jack at any other time. It was a horrible despairing sort of cry.

"Keep your spirits up, Harry; we'll soon fall in with a vessel. Look, the weather is clearing, and it's not blowing half so hard as it was."

Night was setting in, and the wind had sensibly decreased, though it was still raining hard.

"Jack, if you survive me and get picked up, will you——"

"We're all right, Harry. Do be a man. Why, we're not out twenty-four hours yet, and we can live a week or more without food. See, the rain is stopping now; we'll have a fine night, and at daylight get on to some homeward-bounder, and be back in London before the *White Rose* is ready to start."

When darkness came on, the rain ceased and the wind died away into a gentle four-knot breeze. The stars came out, and everything betokened a fine night.

"Now, Harry, you try and get a snooze; I'll rouse you up when I want to be relieved. There's no necessity for baling any longer."

"I can't sleep, Jack, I'm so hungry, and wet, and cold."

"Well, lie down here and rest yourself against me; it will help to keep us both warm."

The poor wretched boy stretched himself out, resting his head against Jack's leg.

"It's rather a moist bed," said Jack, "but try and get some sleep, for I shall want relieving soon."

Harry did not answer, but lay gazing up at the starlit heavens, until the gentle rocking of the boat as she rose and fell on the swell, and the ripple of the water alongside, lulled him into a sleep; so for a time he was able to forget the gnawing pangs of hunger which consumed him.

Jack hardly dared move, though his legs were getting cramped, lest he should wake his companion. He was frightened that if Harry woke he might become delirious, and then things would be worse than ever.

Though Jack was suffering acutely, he was more inured to hardship than Harry, and was consequently able to bear up better. He was

both older and stronger, and had been at sea a year longer; moreover, he felt a sense of responsibility which did much to keep him up.

He sat half through the night without moving a muscle. The breeze had dropped very light, and the stars were shining beautifully clear. His wet clothes acted like a cold-water compress, but he took little notice of this discomfort. His inside seemed to be gnawing itself away. His mouth watered as visions of everything good to eat floated before him in a grim procession. Roast beef, plum pudding, turkey, lamb, pies, tarts, buns, even salt junk and weevily biscuits, came and went, until he felt almost mad, for these visions only increased the hollow, empty gnawing. Suddenly he was roused from his reverie; a faint sound came across the water. There was no mistaking it. It was the "Yo-ho!" of some sailor on a ship, but how far off it was impossible for him to judge.

"Harry—Harry!" he shouted, jumping up from his seat. "A ship! Yell with all your might. Ship ahoy!"

Harry Verdon was on his feet in a moment. "Where am I? What's up?"

"Yell, Harry, for goodness' sake! Yell, or they'll pass us! It's a vessel."

The situation suddenly dawned upon the exhausted Harry, and he joined Jack in hailing.

"Ship ahoy!"

They listened. All was still, but as the boat rose on the swell, they caught sight of the port-side light of a vessel, though it was a long way off.

"It's no good, Harry. They are too far off; they would never hear us."

"One more shout, Jack," cried Harry, who was now more energetic than his companion.

"Just one more."

"It's no good; but are you ready?"

"All ready."

"Now then, both together when she rises."

"Ship ahoy!"

No answer. They watched the light until it disappeared in the distance.

"If it had only been daylight we should have been picked up," said Verdon.

"Never mind. To-morrow it may be all right," answered Jack, as he once more resumed his place in the stern-sheets.

The hunger had been bad before, but during

the excitement of watching the vessel's light it had been forgotten. It now returned with ten-fold force.

"Jack, how long can we live without food?"

"Days," answered Jack huskily.

"Does it gnaw like this all the time, Jack?"

"I don't know. I think you get accustomed to it."

"I hope it won't be like this for days."

Jack did not answer.

"Let me take a spell at that oar, Jack?"

"No, go to sleep; I'm going. The boat can look after herself. There's no sea on; I'll lay the oar in."

"Yes, if anything happens to the boat—well, it doesn't take days to drown."

"Go to sleep, Harry. I tell you to-morrow it will be all right."

"To-morrow! What time is it?"

"Close on midnight, I should say."

"Well, say it will be all right to-day, Jack. Do say to-day," and the poor boy began to laugh and cry alternately.

"Harry, be a man! Stick it out bravely; things will come all right."

"Say to-day, Jack! Do say to-day!"

"All right. To-day. We will get picked up to-day."

"That's right, Jack; you're always right. To-day. To-day;" and Harry Verdon lay in the bottom of the boat during the rest of the night in a semi-conscious state, occasionally murmuring, "To-day!"

Jack was thoroughly exhausted. He had not closed his eyes for over two days and a night, and now, when there was a chance owing to the fine weather, he feared to take the opportunity because of the condition of his companion; so he contented himself by sitting huddled up in the stern-sheets. A new torment was now beginning—that of thirst. Whilst it rained they had been able to stave it off, but now it began to make itself felt. Harry lay moaning at intervals, whilst Jack, buried in thought, never moved. By degrees kindly sleep came to him, and entirely exhausted, his chin dropped on to his chest, and for a time his gnawing pains were forgotten.

The day was just breaking when he awoke; he had forgotten where he was, but the situation was brought only too vividly before him by the pangs of hunger, which were slowly

eating the life out of him, and a consuming thirst, which made him feel inclined to take a draught from the sea, if only to assuage the fire which raged within him for one moment. By a strong effort he, however, pulled himself together.

"Daylight!" He stood up on the after thwart, and scanned the horizon. There was nothing to break the dull monotony of heaving water, so he resumed his place in the stern in a crouching attitude waiting.

Harry Verdon was tossing uneasily in the bottom of the boat, occasionally murmuring the words "To-day," showing that his sleeping thoughts were fixed on their forlorn position. Jack took but little notice of his companion, though occasionally a horrid feeling of vengeance tried to take a place in his heart. It would whisper, "He lost the oar; if he hadn't, you might now have been comfortably aboard, instead of doomed to starvation. Kill him!" These thoughts were but momentary, for he thrust them from him at once, and prayed fervently for deliverance, or in any case courage, whatever their fate might be. At last Harry awoke.

"Jack," he said as he sat up, "you are right. It is to-day. I have seen her, but she was floating in blood."

"What are you talking about, Harry? Oh! don't carry on like that. Things are bad enough as they are. Pull yourself together, old chap."

"I'm quite sensible, Jack. I saw it all in my dreams; we shall get picked up to-day. It was very vivid—but the vessel was floating in blood. I'm not mad, Jack; I know what I'm saying. I can wait, for I know my dream will come true."

Jack thought his chum was wandering, though he looked much calmer and quieter than he had done the night before. Saying no more about the dream, he tried to turn the conversation.

"What wind there is is from the sou'-west. If it would only haul to the nor'ard we might again make the land. We can't have come very far."

Harry made no reply, and the two sat huddled together, waiting—waiting for what? Perhaps days of agonising hunger and thirst, then madness, and then death!

The sun had travelled its daily course, and

was getting low in the heavens, and still the boys sat, having hardly moved all through the weary day.

"Sail, O!" suddenly shouted Jack. In a moment the two were standing on the thwart, their arms circling each other's necks, whilst they gazed over the ocean.

"There she is; do you see her? A schooner!"

"Yes. O Jack, do you think she's real?"

"Real! My word she is. Keep your eye on her whilst I see if I can scull towards her," and getting the oar over the stern he made an attempt to propel the boat along, but he was too weak to keep going for any length of time, and soon gave it up.

"Harry, I can't scull any more. Are we nearer?"

"Yes, we're nearer, but too far off to be heard if we shout."

"I have it. We'll hoist my coat on the oar. They may see it."

They had hardly had this signal up more than a few minutes, when the schooner ran the British ensign up at her peak.

"She sees us!" they shouted together.
"Thank God, we're saved." For a moment

they dropped the signal as they knelt on the bottom boards of the boat, and thanked Almighty God. When they again looked, the schooner had altered her course, and was slowly bearing down on them.

After nearly an hour of terrible anxiety—for the breeze was so light that the schooner had but little way—they were alongside her, and were hailed by English voices. At that moment Harry shouted—

“O Jack, I'm done!” and fell senseless in the bottom of the boat.

“One hand into the boat, and sling him,” came a rough voice. “Hurry up! We can't waste time over boys.”

Jack just had strength to scramble into the chains, when he felt his head swimming round. He was seized by the strong arms of a seaman, and landed on the schooner's deck, and for a short time the two castaway boys were lying unconscious, surrounded by a curious and inquisitive group of unkempt and villainous-looking seamen, who formed the crew of the schooner *Pearl*.

CHAPTER VI

JACK RECOGNISES AN ENEMY

RUM has often been the cause of many a seaman's death. It has also saved many a one's life.

"Here, open his jaws, and get some of this here rum down his gullet. That's the stuff to bring back any life he may have left in him. There! that's it, he's opening his peepers already," said a man with a gruff voice.

These were the first words Jack heard uttered on regaining consciousness.

"Now, then, somewhat for them to eat, and then after a good snooze they'll be as strong as a dog with two tails."

As soon as the boys were sufficiently recovered, they knelt together on the deck and thanked God for their deliverance.

"Here, none of that psalm-smiting on this craft, or over you go again in that boat! We're men, or devils if you like that better, aboard of this schooner."

It was quite dark by the time the boys had had some food.

"There's no bunks for you," said the gruff man, who was apparently the mate, "so you can shake down on the deck. Here's a couple of sacks."

Neither Jack nor Harry was particular where he slept. It was quite sufficient for them that the cravings of hunger and thirst were appeased, and that they were aboard a substantial craft. They were so weary that they hardly noticed what an inhospitable reception they had received; but lying down side by side close to the fore scuttle hatch, they were in a few minutes buried in profound slumber.

A confused babble of voices roused them.

"I say, Harry, I believe we're on a coolie ship. What a jabbering!" Being thoroughly awakened, they jumped up and looked aft. Here they saw a number of almost naked natives. They were for a moment inclined to laugh at the sight, but suddenly to their horror they saw that the poor creatures were all manacled.

"This is a slaver," said Harry in consternation.

"No," answered Jack, "there are no slavers in these seas, but I think I know what kind of craft we're on; if so, we're amongst a bad crowd."

"Bring the black devil along!" shouted a red-bearded brutal-looking man, who was apparently the skipper, to the gruff man whom our heroes had seen the night before. "Bring him along. I've shot two, I'll hang this one, and see if that will tame them!"

The mate, who was armed with a revolver and a piece of rattling line well knotted, called to two of the seamen, and they rushed in amongst the poor wretched prisoners, knocking them right and left, and using the most frightful oaths.

"Come along, you skulking dog," cried the mate as he seized one of them. "You're the one we want; you'll make a pretty ensign, you will, flying from the peak."

"Captain," he shouted, "any one seeing us with him a-dangling from the peak will think we're flying the jolly Roger."

The assembled seamen laughed at this brutal joke; and the mate began to drag his victim along, but suddenly one of the poor wretches,

being unable to restrain his fury, lifted both arms and brought his ironed wrists with a mighty force on to the mate's head. The blow would have split any ordinary man's skull, but not so the mate's. In a moment he had felled his assailant and two others to the deck, where they lay insensible.

"Your turn, my beauty, will come when we have disposed of this black bird. One at a time; the fun lasts the longer one at a time," and he dragged his victim aft.

All this time Jack and Harry stood looking in utter bewilderment at such brutality.

"Harry, they're going to hang him, but they shan't whilst I can prevent it. Will you stick to me?"

"Of course I will, Jack, but what can we do against those three brutes aft, to say nothing of the seamen?"

"I did not notice there were three. But if there were a thousand, I'd have a slap at them. Look, there is one loose. He will help us if we give him the lead. Why, he's acting as cook. See him at the galley."

"I see him. The odds are against us; but say when you're ready, and I'm with you. The

brutes! they're going to flog him before they hang him."

"Now then, Parson, read the burial service. Lay it on thick; it will console him," shouted the skipper to the third man, who now came from off the skylight where he had been sitting.

"Have you got your prayer-book?"

"I have," he answered, as he produced a "cat-o'-nine-tails" and commenced to flog the poor native, who was held by two seamen, each stroke cutting him to the bone.

"Is the noose ready?" shouted the skipper.

"All ready," answered the mate.

"Then three more strokes—slow ones—and up he goes."

"For the love of God, save him!" cried the native cook, in broken English, running up to the boys. "I saw you pray last night. Save him. I am a Christian."

"Ay, ay," answered Jack and Harry in one breath.

"Come quick. They are putting the noose round his neck."

The schooner was flush-decked, and with one bound the two boys, followed by the cook, were aft at the scene of execution.

“Avast,” yelled Jack, “you cruel, black-hearted villains! you murderous scoundrels! You, who dare hoist the British flag.”

For a moment every one stood amazed, but it was only for a moment.

“Run him up, my lads,” roared the skipper. The rope was round the victim’s neck, but in a second Jack had drawn his sheath-knife and severed it, and the men, who were prepared for a strong pull, fell on their faces.

“Hurrah!” yelled the two boys. The skipper pulled out his revolver, but at the moment he fired, the black cook, rushing up, hit his arm, and the bullet found its billet in the heart of the mate, who fell dead.

The whole crew now rushed upon the boys, and for some minutes there was a fierce fight. There could be but one result. The boys were overpowered.

“Reeve a fresh line, one hand, and we’ll string them up. There will be no inquiries for castaways.”

“Not just now,” said the man who had been called Parson, and who had inflicted the flogging. “Not just now; give them time for reflection. It’s so nice to count the hours

of the clock going round, and to know that you must hang at a certain time."

"Right you are!" said the skipper. "Tomorrow at sunrise; will that do?"

"That will do nicely."

Jack thought this man's voice, as well as his features, were familiar; but he could not exactly call to mind where he had seen him. He looked very young to be such a hardened villain.

"Lash them all together," said the skipper, "the two blacks and the boys. Don't mind leaving too much room for the circulation."

"Ay, ay, sir. We'll frap them so as they don't escape."

The two boys and the natives were soon secured; they were not simply linked together, but a lashing was put round them, as if they were a bundle of faggots.

The man called Parson, seeing them thus, said to the skipper, "What say, if we put them in a tar-barrel, and fire it, and set it afloat? It would make a pretty blaze."

"No, no," said the skipper; "hanging will do." Hardened villain though he was, he could not stomach this fiendish suggestion.

"All right," said the other. "'Pon mv

word, I think you're getting soft-hearted, captain."

"No, I ain't; but if any of the crew ever peached, it would sound bad, whereas we might account for a hanging. It looks more legal; necessary to prevent further mutiny, do you see?"

"I know him," whispered Jack to Harry. "Good gracious, how awful!"

"Know whom?"

"Why, the one they call Parson. The hardened brute, he can't be more than twenty years old."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Hackett. I was at school with him but three years ago."

"At school with him?"

"Yes. My word! it's too awful to think of his coming to this."

"Jack, you must be mistaken; that man is more than twenty."

"No, I'm sure it's him."

"Gag those boys; they're holding a palaver," shouted the skipper, "and then heave the mate overboard. He ain't a pleasant sight lying there."

Both orders were soon executed. Pieces of

wood were placed in the boys' mouths, and made fast firmly with spun yarn behind their heads, so that it was impossible for them to hold further conversation. Two seamen then picked up the mate's body and hove it overboard.

"Why didn't you make something fast to it? It's afloat alongside."

The wind had died quite away and the vessel lay becalmed.

"I can't stand to see him grinning at us. Get the boat over and sink him."

"The boys' boat ain't been hoisted inboard yet," shouted a seaman. "It's towing astern."

"Haul it alongside then, and tow the body away a few fathoms and sink it. We don't want him lying under our keel. He might do some damage."

"Pass another oar down," cried a seaman who had jumped into the boat. "There's only one in her."

The body was towed some quarter of a mile from the vessel, and then sunk.

The four captives were placed close to the main hatch; the rest of the prisoners were kept below.

The skipper and the Parson walked up and down the after-deck for some time, and Jack had ample opportunity of studying their features. He paid little attention to the skipper's, but scrutinised the Parson closely, hoping that he had been mistaken in his suppositions that it was Hackett. But the more he looked at him the more convinced he became that it was his old school-fellow. His face bore great traces of dissipation, which made him look prematurely old, yet there was no mistaking him; his voice and every movement and gesture were Hackett's, and Jack spent some hours wondering how he came to be on the schooner. He was certainly not an officer, nor yet a passenger, as the skipper paid him a good deal of respect, so he came to the conclusion that he must be the owner. But how or why he had come to be associated with such scoundrels Jack could not conceive.

The day passed wearily on. No food or water was given to the victims. The boys' jaws at first only ached with the gags, but as hour after hour went on the aching became agonising, and they were consumed with a dreadful thirst. The crew of the schooner

seemed to do no work, and got served with a plentiful supply of grog. There was one seaman who every time he passed seemed to look with pity on them, and Jack once or twice thought he made a sign to them, but he was not sure ; indeed, he did not much care. He had lost all hope, and was trying to get his mind ready for his journey to the next world. Though gagged and bound, this could not prevent him from prayer, and whilst he prayed earnestly for deliverance yet he was prepared to meet his fate calmly. His great earthly sorrow was that of leaving his mother all alone in the world.

The weary day passed slowly on. The sun got low in the horizon, and gradually sank from sight in its ocean bed. There was barely a ripple on the water ; all was calm and still. The decks were deserted save by the man at the wheel, who lolled sleepily on the grating, and the four victims were left alone to take a farewell of the sun, whose reappearance would be the signal to usher them into the next world.

CHAPTER VII

A FRIEND IN NEED

WITH limbs aching and throbbing from the tight cords which bound them, parched and hungry, and suffering indescribable torment from the cruel gags as the hours passed on, the two boys almost longed for the time of execution. Jack was thankful that they had at least been left to themselves. At times he felt nearly ready to burst with rage at the inhuman treatment, but he prayed earnestly that he might not die with hatred in his heart; and, after subduing such paroxysms, the tears would roll down his cheeks as he thought how soon his life and Harry's were to be cut short, and for no crime other than that of taking the boat for mere fun.

The night was very dark. Only a few stars shone out here and there amidst the gloom. Jack gazed up at these, and thought of the many different scenes on which they were shining.

Suddenly he heard a slight movement. It

was as of some one coming along the deck with bare feet.

"More barbarity to be practised," he thought. The next moment a man was alongside him.

"Not a sound from you," whispered the man. "Not a sound, or your lives, and mine as far as that goes, will not be worth a five minutes' purchase." As he spoke he drew out his knife and cut the spun yarn which held the gags. Neither of the boys could speak. Their strained jaws refused to move, and their swollen tongues to act.

The man went across to the water breaker, and silently filling the dipper with the precious liquid brought it to them. Never did famished mariners enjoy a drink more. It loosed their tongues, and they were able to whisper thanks.

"Never mind that kind of palaver, sonny. I ain't done much. You're to hang at sunrise—so says the Parson, and so says the skipper, but you ain't, so says I. Now, you follow my directions, and I'll get you clear of this craft. Do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Jack. "But you'll save these two poor natives too, won't you?"

"Well, I worn't going to, but I may as well. I owe them no grudge, though God knows I've done them enough harm in my time."

"But how are we to escape?" inquired Jack anxiously.

"I'll tell ye. We keeps no watch in fine weather as they does in other ships. All hands turns in except one as takes four hours' trick at the wheel, look-out, and all other duties. All he's got to do is to keep his eyes skinned, and give the skipper, or the mate when he wor alive, a rouse when a breeze comes. Well, I'm on deck from twelve till four, and that's the time you'll have to make yourself scarce. I'll arrange everything. Your own boat is in the water towing astern. All you've got to do is to keep quiet, and if any one comes to have a look at you, to put them gags in your mouths until they goes. Put them in now, here comes the watchman;" and their friendly visitor disappeared down the fore scuttle, quite forgetting that they were powerless to move their hands so as to replace the gags. However, the watchman passed them, and made straight for the fore scuttle.

The boys' hearts nearly stopped beating. They thought for a moment that their friend had been overheard making plans for their

escape, and was now about to be challenged with it, and they were much relieved when they heard the watchman call down the scuttle, and with a decidedly American accent say, he'd "guess you had better get ready to come on deck. It wants five minutes to eight bells."

"All right," came the answer, in a drowsy tone.

"Say, 'taint all right. Just put the sleep out of your eyes, and come on deck ;" and the watchman walked aft again.

In a few minutes the relief came shambling along the deck.

"You're in a mighty hurry, chum. It ain't twelve o'clock yet by half a minute."

"The clock is slow, I tell you," answered the American. "Why, you're half asleep now. Wake yourself up whilst I give you charge of the ship."

"I'm awake ; go ahead !"

"Well, I suppose if you ain't now, you soon will be. The orders is, call the skipper if a breeze springs up, make coffee for all hands so as to have it ready at four. He wants every one to be lively so as to run up they varmin at sunrise, and keep a sharp eye on the prisoners and all the natives."

"Is that all ?"

"That's all! If 'taint enough, make some more for yourself;" and the American dived below into the forecabin.

All remained quiet for about half an hour, and the boys began to think that their friend was not going to fulfil his promise. Indeed, that half-hour to them seemed longer than a whole watch, but at last they again heard the footsteps coming towards them.

"Now, look you here," said their friend Ned, as he was called, "I don't mind cutting you two boys adrift, but these blacks I'm doubtful of. Let me see, one's the cook, he can speak English. Here you, cook, s'pose I cast you adrift, will you remain where you are, and do as I tells you?"

"I will," said the poor wretched creature. "I will never move till you give the word."

"But what about your chum?—he's only a savage, and can't be trusted."

The cook said a few words in a foreign tongue to his companion, then turning to Ned, said "he would answer for him with his life."

"That ain't much of a guarantee, but I'll take your word for it. Now, if either of you disobeys, I'll kill you, do you hear?" he said, producing a revolver, and pointing it at them.

"I think they'll be all right," said Jack, who was dying to get his cords loosened.

"Here goes then! I'll chance it," and in a few moments their lashing had been severed by a few strokes of Ned's sharp knife, and they were at liberty.

"You may just stretch yourselves and then remain quiet where you are till I come for you," said their deliverer, who then made his way silently aft again. Jack and Harry threw their arms round each other's necks, in the first ecstasy of delight at again feeling themselves free.

Ned in a few minutes returned.

"Now, I shan't be ready for you just yet, but if you are discovered make a fight for it. Use your knives if necessary, and make for the port gangway. I've hauled the boat up there, and overboard you goes into her and away."

The prisoners waited in a terrible state of anxiety until their friend should come back and tell them that all was ready. They could hear him moving about aft, though he was as stealthy as a cat. Their sense of hearing was so acute from anxiety that they were able to hear the slightest noise.

"Will he never be ready?" whispered Harry. "Look, the dawn is already beginning to break. O Jack, this may be our last morning on earth. Let's make a bringe for it."

"No, keep quiet, Harry. He can't be long now." Then a horrid thought struck Jack. He had read of the Chinese torture of hope. Perhaps they were undergoing it. It was with the greatest difficulty that he restrained himself from using his liberty. Every minute the blackness of night was giving place to the grey of dawn.

"At last here he comes! Oh, thank goodness!"

"Now then, lads, move along as if you was phantoms. Not a sound, mind you."

This strange, weird-looking procession moved along the deck like five ghosts. Ned was the first over the gangway, then Harry.

"Who's that?" came a voice from the after-companion, which they recognised as that of the Parson.

"Over with you," yelled Ned from the boat.

In a moment the two blacks were in the boat; Jack was just following, when he was seized by the Parson, who was yelling lustily to give an alarm.

By a tremendous effort he wrenched himself clear.

"Tom Hackett—you scoundrel," cried Jack, at the same time catching him a tremendous blow under the chin, which sent him reeling across the deck, where he came in violent contact with the skipper, who was rushing to the rescue, and the two rolled over in the water-ways. In an instant Jack was over the side and into the boat. With a tremendous shove from the boat-hook she shot away from the schooner's side.

"Hurrah!" yelled the boys.

Bang—bang, came a couple of shots.

"Pull for your lives, lads!" yelled Ned, who was at the tiller. "Pull,"—bang—"O God! Pull!" The boat literally flew through the water.

"Give way," came the voice of Ned, sounding rather husky. The schooner had faded from sight in the indistinct light, but shot after shot flew over and around the boat. They heard a mighty yell of baffled vengeance from the schooner's crew, and a volley from half-a-dozen revolvers, but they were now out of range.

"That will do—easy," said Ned weakly. "We're all safe now, except me."

"Are you hit?"

"Yes, a bit of a graze; but I'm bleeding bad. Just see if you can take a turn round my shoulder with a rag."

Jack jumped aft, and tearing a piece from his shirt, bound up a wound which was bleeding profusely. The others were pulling like demons.

"No occasion for such a hurry," cried Ned.

"But they'll pursue us, and then we're done."

"No, they won't, and because why? I've got their gear in this boat, oars, mast, sails, and all the blessed paraphernalia, and I reckon they'll find a hole in the bottom of their boat, as will take them a few hours to repair."

As daylight increased the schooner was again visible.

"If they get a breeze, they'll have us," cried Harry.

"Well, they ain't got a breeze, and if they does, I cut the lanyards of all the riggin', so they can't get any sail on her until they reeve new ones, and that will take them a day. Mayhap they won't notice it at once, then up comes a breeze and over goes their sticks. But I feels a bit bad: give us a drop of that stuff out of the barrel under the thwarts."

Being now well clear of the schooner, and it

being daylight, Jack examined their deliverer's wound. It had almost ceased to bleed externally.

"You'll be all right, Ned," said Jack as he re-bound the place.

"No, sonny, I'm done. I feel it a-bleeding in my in'ards. I'm a gone coon, but never mind me. Here comes a breeze. Step that mast and get the sail hoisted, and watch the schooner, and you'll see somewhat as will employ the crew for a week or two."

In a few minutes the sail was set, and they watched the breeze as it came along on the glassy surface of the becalmed ocean, cutting it up into little furrows.

"Look, here it comes! It will take the schooner first. Ah, they think they'll catch us—do you hear them shout?"

"Let's pull, or they'll have us," cried Jack.

"No, just watch her," said Ned. "There, she feels it; now she lays over. Crack, away goes her sticks. Blow me tight, if that ain't a sight!"

The boat's crew sent up a ringing cheer, as they saw the schooner denuded of her masts. At that moment the breeze filled the sail of the boat. Away she sped, and the schooner was soon hull down, and out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

ONE LIFE FOR FOUR

As soon as the boat's crew felt themselves safe from any pursuit from the schooner, their first care was to make their wounded deliverer as comfortable as circumstances would permit. The two boys divested themselves of some garments, and made a bed in the bottom of the boat, where they laid their companion. They then held a consultation as to which would be the best place to make for. Harry was for trying to fetch the coast of New Zealand, but as they were not at all sure how far off it was, and, as near as they could judge of their position by the sun, the breeze was from the westward, and consequently a head wind, they decided to make a fair wind of it, and run for one of the numerous islands in these seas.

The cook was delighted when he heard of their decision, and told them that he would take them to one where they would find a missionary, and where ships called.

Poor Ned, as the day wore on, became very ill.

"I'm feared I'm done, lads," he said; "I've led a bad life, and it serves me right, but I only hope you'll get safe ashore. It's a bit of comfort to me to think as how I got this wound in doing a decent act instead of on some murdering cut-throat expedition."

He had indeed done a good action, for not only had he got the boys and the two natives away safely, but he had during the hours they were waiting amply provisioned the boat. He had placed a barge¹ of biscuits, two pieces of salt junk (cooked), a breaker of water, besides oars, mast, and sail. Added to this, he had knocked a hole in the schooner's boat, and cut the lanyards of the rigging. Not a bad four hours' work for one man, and all done without any noise.

"Ned," said Jack, who was steering, "what made you think of coming to our rescue?"

"Well, I'll tell you how it was, sonny. You mind when you first came aboard as how you went down on your knees and thanked God for your deliverance. That minded me that I

¹ A wooden box used by sailors to keep their biscuits in.

had been taught to do the like when I was a lad afore I went to sea ; and I felt ashamed of myself for being on that schooner, and I makes a vow as how that, when I got ashore, I would part company from my shipmates and try and do better, and that night as I lay in my bunk I made an attempt at praying. I had near forgot how, but somehow I calls to mind a bit of Scripture I had often heard years ago, and I says, ' Lord be merciful to me a sinner, and I'll try to act straight,' and then I says to myself, ' Now, if ever I get a chance I'll do what is right, for I'm no man, only a bloodthirsty pirate."

His voice was growing weak, and Jack asked him not to talk any more at present.

" Ay, ay, lad, I'll be quiet, only do you think there's any chance for me? I've run bad all my life, and it seems sort of mean to go snivelling now as I'm paying the penalty."

Jack was no great shakes at preaching, but he was a devout youth, and did his best to console the poor fellow. The man lay still for some time, and then rousing himself, asked for a drink. This Jack handed him.

" Ah!" he said, as he swallowed it at a gulp,

"that makes me feel better. I'll be able to tell you something I wants to before I pegs out."

"You had better not talk," urged Jack.

"What I've got to say is short, but I'll feel better after I've said it, and if I lies still and don't speak at all I dies, and if I talks I dies all the same, so I'll just tell you what I wants to say. Just another drink, lad, and I'll get under way."

Jack handed him the drink, and after propping him up a bit he started.

"You saw him as they called Parson?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was him as got me on this 'ere voyage. I've been bad, but I never would have come on such a freight had it not been for his lies, and that I swear."

"What was the schooner doing with the natives? They don't take them as slaves?" asked Harry.

"I'll tell you, lad. I was shipped in Sydney; there was nothing said about getting natives, or I swear I wouldn't have shipped, bad as I am. I was walking along the circular quay looking for a ship, as I had spent all my money, when I meets the Parson. He says, 'What ho! Jack, are you looking for a ship?'

"‘I am,’ I says, ‘but what’s that to you? You ain’t no sailor?’

"‘No,’ he says, ‘but I’m an owner.’

"‘I hates owners,’ I says.

"‘Well, come up into a public-house, and we’ll have a drink.’

"‘I’ve no objection to that,’ says I, ‘but you’re a queer sort to be an owner. Why, you ain’t properly fledged yet. What ship do you own? Hardship, I expects.’

"He takes no notice, but calls for a drink, and then another and another, and all the time he talks of as how he had a schooner all ready to sail for the South Sea Islands. ‘Good pay,’ he says, ‘ten pounds a month, and a bit extra if she made a good voyage.’

"Well, he fills me pretty well drunk, and I signs on. I don’t remember much about anything else till I got aboard, then I finds out how they were a-going to get a cargo of blacks for the Pearl fisheries. I knew they couldn’t get them by fair means, only by kidnapping them, and I up and told them I wouldn’t have nothing to do with such a trade; but the Parson talks me round, and tells me how much money was to be got at it, and I consents to go in with the

rest of them, and that's how you found me aboard that schooner." Here the man stopped, but he soon pulled himself together, and went on. "You may say you didn't mean to go again, and you were deceived. That's right enough, but when I falls in with you it was my third voyage, I had become a hardened brute. The pay was good, and you see I sold myself body and soul to that Parson."

"Why do you call him Parson?" asked Jack.

"'Cause he used to pretend to be a missionary, and get the natives to come aboard, and when he thought he had a good gang of youngish ones, he'd get them below to barter; then, suddenly jumping on deck hisself, hatches on batten down, and off to sea, knocking any who might happen to be on deck on the head, and heaving their carcasses overboard. O God, I've been a wicked man!"

Again he lay back, and it was some time before he recovered. Jack talked to him gently, giving him what comfort he could. The poor fellow held his hand and listened attentively, but did not speak.

The little boat sped on before the wind with gentle rolls, and once more the time came for

the sun to set, and the heavens were soon brilliantly illuminated with stars. Hardly any one had spoken for hours. The dying man lay breathing heavily, yet never once let go of Jack's hand. He was perfectly conscious, for he occasionally opened his eyes and gave a look of recognition to those around him.

It must have been about eight in the second dog-watch when he again spoke.

"What time is it?" he inquired feebly.

"We've got no watch, Ned; but I should think it's about eight o'clock."

"Eight o'clock? Eight bells—relieve the wheel! Yes, it's my last watch on deck. I'm going fast, lads. Pray for me, for I want it bad—and when I'm gone, and you've got safe home again, think sometimes of Ned—though he worn't no better than a pirate till he saw you pray. Solon, chaps! I'm going. God have mercy on me! Solon!"

Jack and Harry knelt beside the dying man for some minutes. He breathed hard, then a shiver seemed to run through his whole frame; he gave a slight shudder; his hand, which had so long held Jack's, relaxed its grasp, and poor Ned lay dead.

And Jack, as he covered their deliverer over with a monkey-jacket, whispered to Harry, "Greater love hath no man than that he layeth down his life for another! God rest his soul!"

Harry and the cook answered a reverent "Amen."

All sat silent for some time. The breeze bore the boat along gallantly, and the water rippled past with a soft musical sound; the stars shone peacefully overhead, and no cloud appeared in the heavens to dull their brilliancy.

"Harry," said Jack, "as we must bury him, I've been thinking that it would be nice if we did it at sunrise, just at the time he received his wound in saving us. Shall we wait till then, or shall we do it now?"

"We'll wait, Jack. It seems unkind to throw him over before he's cold."

The night passed on slowly. No one slept. The grey dawn was the signal for them to prepare to launch their friend over into the mighty deep.

"Harry, if you go forward you will find a twelve-pound weight in the bow. It was put

in for ballast, but we shan't require it—fetch it aft, will you?”

Harry went forward and returned with the weight. Making it fast to the dead mariner's feet, Jack said a few prayers, and then he and Harry, assisted by the cook, lifted the body reverently and dropped it over the stern. For a moment or two it floated, but the weight gradually got the mastery, and as the sun rose, the body of Ned disappeared beneath the waves.

“No more the foe can harm,
No more of leaguered camp—
And cry of night alarm,
And need of ready lamp.
And yet how nearly had he failed—
How nearly had that foe prevailed!”

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE

SORRY as the boys were at the death of one who had rendered them such signal service, yet they experienced a great sense of relief as soon as the body had sunk, and they were leaving it astern at the rate of a good five and a half knots an hour. They had not been together long enough to miss him much; moreover, their position was one of great jeopardy. They certainly had a good sea-worthy boat, a fair amount of provisions, and the prospect of fine weather, but they had no nautical instruments, not even a compass.

Moreover, one of the crew was almost a savage, smarting under terrible injuries inflicted upon him and his fellow-countrymen, presumably by Englishmen, and Jack thought it very probable that he would be unable to distinguish between good and bad men, and would in all likelihood take the first opportunity of avenging his injuries on them. He mentioned this to

the cook, who, however, assured him that his countryman was quite aware that he was amongst friends, and that they had risked their lives to save him, and that he was filled with gratitude.

During the day the cook told the boys some of his history. He had when a boy been brought in contact with missionaries, and been taught by them the Christian religion; he became a servant to one of them, and used to accompany him on his visits to different islands. During one of these visits his master had been killed, and he himself taken prisoner, but he managed to make his escape. He had also been to Australia, and knew a good deal about ships and Englishmen. Indeed, he was quite civilised, and an intelligent, and to all appearances what was much better, a thoroughly sound Christian. His great ambition was to return to his countrymen, and help the missionaries to convert them from their barbarous habits to Christianity.

"But how came it," asked Jack, "that you got captured by the schooner's crew?"

"I was on my own island, amongst my own people. I had been telling them about the

missionaries, and they wanted them to come. I was about to set out in a canoe to an island about three days' journey to ask one to come whom I knew to be there, when to my delight I saw a ship, a schooner, standing in towards the island. I thought it was a mission ship, and we all came down to meet it. No one was afraid, and when the schooner anchored we went off in our canoes to her. I did not like the look of the men on her, but the one they called Parson knelt down and prayed, and I thought it was all right. He told me that they could not stay long, but would come back. We went to and fro between the island and the schooner for two days, then the Parson asked me to bring off twenty of the best young men on the island, and he would preach to them, and I should interpret, and he would show them over the vessel. When we got aboard he told us to go down into the 'tween decks, and he would show us everything. He stood at the hatchway, and as soon as we were all down, on went the hatches and we were left in the dark, the anchor was hove up, and the schooner put to sea! Oh, it was horrible! We fought when they opened the hatch, but they shot two.

That kept us quiet ; they made me cook—you know the rest." Here the poor fellow, overflowing with pent-up rage and emotion, broke down.

I have given an outline of his story not exactly as he told it ; for though he spoke English fairly well, it would be tedious to write it as he spoke.

Jack and Harry were indignant at the wickedness of the schooner's crew, especially with Hackett. Jack could not imagine how he had sunk so low in so short a time, or how it was possible for one brought up as he had been to have turned out such a brute.

Before night they divided the boat's crew into two watches, the same as they would have been on board a ship, Harry and the cook, whom the boys called Bogy, being in one, and Jack and the other native, whom they called Peko (as that was the nearest approach they could get to a word he was continually uttering, which Bogy said was the name of his wife), in the other.

Peko seemed a friendly creature, and Jack and he spent most of their watch trying to understand each other. Though they made

but little progress in learning each other's language, yet they got on fairly well by signs.

For days the wind continued steady and from the same quarter. Bogy was confident of being able to find his island, as he used the stars for a compass.

"Will it be safe for you to land there?" asked Jack; "won't they think that you have betrayed them, as it was you who told them how good the missionaries were. They will think you were in league with the schooner's crew."

Bogy looked perplexed. He had not thought of that.

"Yes, Master Jack, you are right; they will kill me if I go there. We must go to some other island, and send Peko to tell them how it all happened, then he will come back for us; when they know the truth, they will not hurt us."

They had been in the boat ten days when they sighted land. It was a small low-lying island. Both Jack and Harry were for putting in, but Bogy strongly advised them not to, as he feared the natives there would be very fierce; so they took his advice and continued on their course. Their provisions were getting very

short—all their meat was consumed, and they had to subsist on an allowance of one biscuit and a pannikin of water a day; but now that they had got amongst the islands, they had no fear of starvation, as if things came to the worst they could put in somewhere and chance the natives. They sighted three islands during that day, but next morning there was no sign of land anywhere.

About mid-day Harry, who was steering, sung out that he saw something that looked like a wreck floating on the water. Bogy jumped up, and, standing on the thwart, looked long and anxiously at it.

"War canoes," he suddenly cried. "Down with the sail, Master Jack, and pull, or they will see us."

But it was too late; the occupants of the canoes had evidently sighted the boat's sail, for they altered their course in their direction and approached rapidly.

The wind had dropped very light, and though the crew, wearied with their long voyage, and weak from want of sufficient food, tried hard to get away, the canoes overhauled them hand over hand.

"It's no good," cried Jack ; "we can't get away from them. Better take it easy and see if we can't make friends."

"No, no," cried Bogy ; "pull, or they will kill us."

Though they strained every muscle the canoes overhauled them, until even Bogy saw that it was useless to continue their flight.

Resting on their oars, they watched the approach of the canoes. There were five in all. They were long, narrow things, crammed with savages.

"It would have been better to have been hanged than eaten," said Harry gloomily.

"Cheer up, old chap ; we're not dead yet. We've got out of one desperate situation, and whilst there's life there's hope," said Jack encouragingly. "Where do you think they come from, Bogy ?"

"I don't know, Master Jack, but they are going to fight. They are in war canoes. It may be all right—I have thought of a plan. Do everything I tell you."

"All right, Bogy ; we will trust to you."

The two leading canoes were now quite

close. A lot of natives were standing up in them with spears poised.

"Stand up," cried Bogy, "and hold your hands up above your heads, to show you are not armed."

The boys did as they were bid.

"I say," said Jack; "what fine targets we would make, standing like this, if they want any practice."

Bogy suddenly yelled out something in his native tongue.

Then a rapid conversation was heard between him and a man in the nearest canoe, who appeared to be a kind of chief. After a time Bogy turned to the boys and told them to pull, adding, "I think all will be well if we help them in the fight, but I cannot yet tell."

The two leading canoes kept on either side of the boat, whilst the other three brought up the rear.

It took the weary boat's crew all their time to keep up with the canoes, but whenever they showed signs of flagging, the natives brandished their weapons and shouted to Bogy, who implored the boys to try and keep up.

After about an hour's pull, they came in

slight of a low-lying island, and to this the party directed their course. It was now an absolute calm, and the little fleet travelled through the glassy sea at a good speed. The natives kept up a low chanting song as they propelled their canoes. It would have been rather a romantic way of travelling for the boys had they not been dead tired and almost famished, besides being in doubt as to the intentions of the natives, which might be to kill and eat them as soon as they got ashore.

Both Bogy and Peko seemed very glum, and worked away at the oars, only occasionally exchanging a few words.

They rapidly approached the island. The boys could only get an occasional glance at it by looking over their shoulders. Presently one of the canoes went ahead of the others to act as a pilot, and the rest of the fleet slackened their pace. This gave Jack and Harry an opportunity of inspecting the land. It seemed a very small islet, though not destitute of vegetation.

“Cocoa-nuts!” said Harry, “how jolly!” quite forgetting his perilous position.

"Yes; and other good things, I expect, if they will only let us have them," answered Jack gloomily. "I say, Bogy, you'll get us some cocoa-nuts, whatever happens, won't you?"

"I will try, Master Jack; but pull away. We must go through the opening in the reef."

In a few minutes the boat was in the lagoon, and the natives and the boys jumped ashore.

It is hardly necessary to explain the topography of the islands, as the coral islands of the South Seas have so often been written about, and they are mostly much the same. They are invariably surrounded by a reef of coral, which acts as a breakwater; so, once within this, vessels are well sheltered from the waves, which spend their energy on the barrier.

Two natives, as soon as the lads had landed, secured their hands with a lashing, and leading them to a clump of cocoa-nut trees, motioned them to sit down.

Bogy and Peko were not made prisoners, but at once began to hold a long conversation with a big handsome man who appeared to be

the chief. I say handsome, for his features were good, but were somewhat spoilt by tattooing.

As soon as the boys had seated themselves, the two natives lashed their feet together, and were about to leave them, when Harry shouted out, "Johnny, get me a cocoa-nut!"

The natives looked and shook their heads, showing that they could not understand.

"Cocoa-nut," shouted Jack, looking up towards the overhanging fruit; but the natives only shook their heads and left them.

"Jack, what a jolly place this is! I wish we weren't prisoners. I wonder if these fellows are cannibals?"

"No, I don't think they are, though they're partial to human sacrifices; but we will soon learn from Bogy. Look how he's talking to that chief. He would have made a good lawyer, if he had been in a civilised country."

"I don't feel a bit as if I were going to be a sacrifice. Do you? The climate is so delightful."

"Well, I hope we arn't. These chaps may be quite tame."

"They may be, but I'm a bit doubtful, other-

wise why did they capture us. We couldn't possibly do them any harm away at sea in our boat. I wish we had landed at one of the islands we saw yesterday."

"No good crying over spilt milk, Harry. Hallo! here come Bogy and Peko. It's all up with us. Look at their faces."

Bogy passed close to them, but did not even turn his head to look at them. He said quickly, "Cheer up, I will get you safe."

"Oh, Jack, they mean to kill us! I wonder how many times we shall have to run the gantlet. Do you think Bogy can be trusted?"

"Absolutely; but I wonder what they are going to do with us. I wish they would give us something to eat, any way."

It was now nearly dark. The natives had lighted a fire, round which they sat and partook of a meal, but the boys could not see what they were eating. By-and-by one of the two men who had lashed them brought them some bananas and bread-fruit. The boys were ravenous, and ate their allowance in silence, and then making themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, lay back to think, and watch their captors.

"Do you think they will kill us, Jack?" asked Harry.

"I don't know ; but I'm getting quite accustomed to awkward situations. I know that Bogy will do his best to help us, and I think Peko will also, so be prepared if we have to make a sudden flit."

The natives soon ceased their chattering, and lay down to sleep. They did not seem to think it necessary to put a guard over the boys, as they probably deemed their lashings quite secure enough to hold them, so they took no further trouble about them.

Wearied by their long voyage in the boat, and lulled by the gentle murmur of the sea as it lapped against the barrier reef, the boys, in spite of their precarious position, soon became drowsy, and before another hour had passed they had both fallen into a deep peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER X

SAFELY LANDED

Bogy, on interviewing the chief, had learned that the party were going to attack the natives of a neighbouring island with whom they were at war. They had suffered a good many defeats of late, and had spent a week in calling on their gods, trying to propitiate them by human sacrifices; for though they had been defeated they had always managed to secure some prisoners. These they offered up to their gods, and in confidence of the efficacy of such sacrifices, a chosen body of warriors had set out on this expedition. Falling in with the boat containing the two white boys they considered a special token vouchsafed to them from their deity, and they determined to sacrifice them before they started on the following morning. Bogy represented himself to be the son of the chief of a powerful island, and Peko as his brother, and he promised to send help if they would spare the boys' lives.

The chief was too keen to forgo the sacrifice which he deemed had been put in his way by his gods, but to propitiate Bogy and Peko, he treated them with great marks of distinction.

The boys were enjoying their much-needed rest, when Jack became aware that his name was being softly whispered.

"Master Jack, Master Jack!" he heard in his dreams, "wake up, but don't make a sound."

Jack was so accustomed to be roused at sea at all times, and to have his wits about him the moment he awoke, that on the repetition of the whisper, he roused himself as desired without making any noise. For a moment he could not recollect where he was, but the soft voice of Bogy recalled him to his senses.

"What is it, Bogy?" was his first inquiry.

"They are going to kill you and Master Harry in the morning, and offer you as a sacrifice. So you must escape."

"I should rather think we must. I have no wish to be sacrificed; but how are we to get away?"

"Wake Master Harry, and I will tell you—all depends on quietness."

"Harry," whispered Jack.

"All right, what's up?" growled Harry aloud.

"For the love of Heaven! don't make a row."

The moment Harry spoke, Bogy and Peko disappeared amongst the cocoa-nut trees.

Jack listened intently for a few minutes, but as there was no movement amongst the natives, he concluded that no one had been aroused.

Harry was now wide awake, and saw the mistake he had made in speaking. At last he whispered, "What is it, Jack?"

"Why, they want to kill us in the morning, and I roused you to tell you that Bogy had made a plan for our escape, only you nearly botched the whole concern by talking so loud."

"I'm awfully sorry, but where's Bogy?"

"Why, he's gone, of course. He doesn't want to get massacred by you rousing all hands."

It was some time before the two natives ventured to return. Indeed, the boys had begun to fear that something had happened to prevent them, but at last they stole cautiously through the trees, and joined the captives.

"You must crawl down to the shore," said Bogy, as he cast off their lashings. "All de-

pend on silence. The least noise may awaken some one, and then we shall all get killed; follow me."

The three crawled cautiously down to the beach, where they were met by Peko, who said something to Bogy, and then conducted them for about twenty yards along the shore until they came to the boat; she was hauled up out of the water, so the great difficulty was to get her launched without making any noise.

The tide was fortunately high, and they had but a little way to lift her before her stern would be afloat.

"She's heavy," said Jack, "and we must lift her bodily. Are you all ready?"

"All ready!"

"Then lift!"

By slow degrees they got her noiselessly into the water. Harry and Jack got into her first, as the two natives were as much at home swimming as they were on dry land, and it was proposed that they should tow her, so as to avoid the splash of oars.

Peko had taken the bearings of the opening in the reef, and piloted them safely into open water. The two natives then climbed aboard,

the oars were got out, and they gave way with a will. Though they felt comparatively safe now that they were outside the barrier, yet they wished to put as much distance between themselves and the island as quickly as possible, so as to stand a good chance should their absence be discovered and a pursuit organised.

For two hours they pulled hard, when Jack called for a spell.

"Where are we bound?" asked Harry.

"I haven't the least idea; where's the nearest island on which we can land in safety, Bogy?"

"There are many islands about here. We will see at daylight."

"Where were the canoes going?"

"They did not tell me, but it would not be far."

"Well, we must get somewhere, or else we shall starve. The breeze is beginning to freshen; just step the mast, and we can sail till we come to an island or fall in with a vessel."

"I've had enough of falling in with vessels," said Harry. "I would sooner form a square meal for the savages than be strung up to a yard-arm by my own countrymen."

The breeze gradually increased until the boat was scudding along at about seven knots an hour.

They continued on the same course that they had been steering before they fell in with the canoes.

The watches were again set. It being Harry's and Bogy's turn below, they made themselves as comfortable as they could. Jack took the tiller, whilst Peko sat on his haunches forward, keeping a look-out. The night was very dark, though the stars shone brightly. The boat steered easily, and Jack soon became thoughtful. It seemed ages since he and Harry had left the *White Rose*, and yet it was scarcely a fortnight.

"How will it all end?" he mused. "First we're nearly getting hung, and now we're only escaping being sacrificed by the skin of our teeth, steering for anywhere, or nowhere. I wonder what the next thing will be."

Suddenly Peko sang out something, which Jack could not understand, but by the tone of his voice he gathered that it was of importance.

"No savvey, Peko," he answered; "wake Bogy."

There was no need of this, for Bogy, the instant his name was mentioned, jumped up.

He and Peko exchanged a few hasty words.

"Master Jack," shouted Bogy, "an island—listen, the surf."

Jack could now distinctly hear the roar of surf breaking on a coral reef. It seemed close now that his attention was called to it, though he had not noticed it before. In another minute they were in broken water, there was a tremendous jolt, the boat's way was suddenly stopped and a sea swept over her, and her occupants were struggling in the water. Jack struck out, and in a few minutes succeeded in climbing ashore, if shore it could be called, for it seemed but a small rock.

"Harry! Harry!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"All right!" came the voice of Bogy; "I've got him."

"Where are you?"

"Here you are," answered Harry, "all safe. Come over here to us. I've hurt my leg."

Jack went along his narrow ledge towards the place from whence the voice came, but soon found that he was separated from them by his ledge coming to an abrupt termination, so abrupt that he nearly again fell into the sea.

"I can't come yet. I'm on a rock, separated from you. I must wait till daylight. I hope you're not much hurt."

"I don't know; I think I am. I say, I hope the tide won't come up and wash us off. Do you see anything of the boat?"

"No; I expect she's gone down."

"Peko has gone to look. What time do you think it is?"

"It must be getting on for daylight."

"I hope so."

Jack sat on his narrow rock, the seas breaking all around him, and occasionally splashing up and sousing him, but after a bit he had the satisfaction of seeing his ledge grow bigger, which proved that the tide was receding.

Though the water was not cold, yet it was not over comfortable sitting in his wet clothes, and time dragged on with leaden wings. He occasionally exchanged a few words with Harry, just to see that he was all right—otherwise nothing was said.

At last the stars began to pale. The dawn broke, and the sun rose from its ocean bed.

The boys were now able to see their position. Harry and Bogy were on a rock of about twenty yards long and ten wide. Jack appeared to be on the same rock, only the sea washed over part of it, thus cutting him off from his com-

panions ; about a quarter of a mile to the west of them was the real coral reef surrounding an island, which was covered with vegetation.

"Here we are!" cried Jack, after taking a survey. "Here we are, and there's an island, but how to get to it! That's the caulker! I'll come across to you now, Harry, and look at your leg."

Throwing off his clothes, he tied them up in a bundle and threw them across. It was only about ten yards wide, but quite deep.

"That makes a splendid bath—quite freshened me up after sitting all night in wet clothes. Now then, old chap, how are you? Let's have a look at the leg. Well, it's not broken, that's a blessing," he continued, after carefully examining it, "but it's a nasty place, and requires rest."

"Of course it does, Jack, but I can't rest very well here, stuck out on a rock in the middle of the sea. Why, the tide may rise, or it may come on to blow at any time and wash us off; besides there's nothing to eat or to drink."

"We must get to the island. There are plenty of cocoa-nuts there and other things, I should think, by the look of it. What do you say, Bogy?"

"Yes, Master Jack, there is plenty on the island, if you can swim there. I can manage to take Master Harry."

"Right you are, I can swim that distance. But I wonder what's become of Peko? I hope he's not drowned."

"No, no, he'll be all right," answered Bogy. "Peko could swim for a whole day. He will be on the island, we will see him soon; he will be asleep under the cocoa-nut trees."

"Well, I hope we can get the boat again; she may have drifted ashore. I vote we start at once, for I'm frightfully hungry and thirsty."

"I am quite ready, as soon as Master Harry is."

"Now then, Harry, off with your clothes, and Bogy will swim with you. I'll wait here until you're safely landed."

Harry mounted Bogy's back. The native left the rock and swam towards the island. He hardly seemed to feel his burden, and clave the water with the ease and grace for which the almost amphibious natives of the South Sea are famous. As soon as they had landed, Jack plunged in, and in due time arrived safely, though a good deal puffed with his long swim.

CHAPTER XI

A LUXURIOUS ISLAND

HARRY was seated under a clump of cocoa-nut trees when Jack joined him, whilst Bogy had made his way up the long stem of one, and was throwing some of the fruit down.

"I say," cried Harry, "isn't it jolly just to sit down and have your breakfast hove at your head. Open some of the nuts, old chap, and let's slog into them. I'm half famished, and as dry as a mummy."

"You had better put some clothes on before you breakfast, unless you mean to turn into a native altogether."

"I haven't got any. Bogy dropped them as he was bringing me ashore; you'll have to lend me some of yours until he dives for them."

"All right, here you are," said Jack, laughing, and tossing his companion a cap.

"I can't dress in a cap. Can't you spare anything else? Let's go halves with what you've got."

"Well, I suppose I must, but you do look

funny," and Jack undid his bundle and divided his garments.

Bogy, before coming down from the tree, yelled out something in his native tongue as loud as he could.

"What's up?" shouted the boys in alarm, thinking they were about to be attacked by some natives.

"I'm only calling to Peko; I think he must be on the island; if he is, he will soon find us, for it is very small."

"I'll come with you to look for him, Bogy, as soon as I've polished off some of these nuts. My word, I'm hungry. I wish I had a beefsteak."

"We will get fish by-and-by."

"Fish! what's the good of fish? We can't eat them raw."

"I will show you how to cook them."

"That's all right—we'll show you how to eat them, won't we, Harry."

"I should rather think so," answered the invalid; "but arn't these nuts good. What else grows on the island, Bogy?"

"I don't know what grows on this one, but I should think bread-fruit, and perhaps bananas."

"That's the ticket! Now then, Jack, hurry up and go and look for Peko."

"Right you are, but I must do your leg up first."

"Oh, never mind me; go and find Peko, and don't forget the bread-fruit and bananas."

"Leg first," said Jack, as he took the sleeve out of his shirt and bandaged the wounded limb.

"It will be a bad place unless it's looked after. How did you do it?"

"Got it scraped on the rocks. I wish it wasn't so stiff, or I'd come with you."

Harry was suffering from a deep cut on the shin-bone, and the wound had a very ugly look—the long sousing in salt water having aggravated the injury.

"There, now you'll do," said Jack, as he made the bandage fast. "'Tisn't very pretty, but it will keep the dirt out; so lie down, and go to sleep till we come back. Solon!"

"Solon! Don't forget the bananas."

"All right."

"And the bread-fruit."

"All right."

"And anything that's good."

"All right; but you're to be put on low diet, so if we find a hog, you won't be allowed to have any."

"Oh, won't I? bring one back and see," shouted Harry, as the two disappeared amongst the trees.

"Now then, Bogy," said Jack, "which way? Along the coast, I suppose?"

"Yes; right round the island, and we are sure to come across him."

"That's if he's not drowned."

"We never get drowned, Master Jack. Peko can swim for a day and not get drowned."

"Well, I didn't suppose he could swim for a day if he did get drowned."

"I don't understand you," said Bogy, looking perplexed.

"It's all right; don't look so puzzled. I say, do you think there are any natives on the island?"

"No; I'm sure there are not. It is very small. If there had been they would have found us. There! there! There's the boat."

"Hurrah!" yelled Jack, as he caught sight of the *White Rose's* gig, lying bottom upwards high and dry.

They soon came up to her. A hasty examination showed that she had had a couple of planks ripped right out of her.

"She's no good to us," said Jack dis-

appointed. "I don't see how we can patch her, so as to make her sea-worthy."

"We will mend her, Master Jack, never fear."

"How do you think she got here?"

"Peko must have brought her. He will not be far away. He will be sleeping, unless he has gone to look for us. He may be in that clump of trees; come and see."

They were fortunate in finding the object of their search, stretched out at full length, sleeping soundly, his hair still wet with the sea-water.

"Don't wake him," said Jack. "He's all right; and as he's brought the boat in, let him finish his snooze out. We'll strike inland and see what we can find, and then come back and rouse him."

Small as the island was, there was an abundance of vegetation.

"This is a perfect paradise for a lazy man, Bogy. I suppose all your countrymen are lazy?"

"Well, Master Jack, they are not very fond of work. You see, food grows on the trees, and we have only to open our mouths and let it drop in."

"It's splendid; I wish Harry was able to

get about. Do you know if ships often visit these small uninhabited islands?"

"Not very often, I think, Master Jack; but we will be able to mend the boat; or, if we can't, we can build a canoe."

After about half-an-hour's walk they again came to the shore, and turning round, made their way back to where they had left Peko. He was still sleeping soundly, but as Jack wanted to get back to Harry, they roused him up.

Peko was delighted to find his companions safe, and as they walked back to where Harry was, he told Bogy how he had swum after the boat, which had capsized, and was floating bottom upwards. He climbed on to her, and sitting straddle legs across her keel, managed to pull a piece of loose planking off her. This he used as a paddle, and he cruised about in this way till daylight, when, seeing an opening in the reef, he paddled her in, and succeeded in running her well up on the beach. Then, making her painter fast to some rocks, he left her, and as the tide was running out she was left high and dry, whilst he, being dead tired, did not trouble to look for his companions, but made himself comfortable and went to

sleep; for he knew that they must either have got ashore in safety, or else have been drowned long before he could have been round to have rendered them any assistance.

"Tell him he's a philosopher of the first water," said Jack to Bogy.

"Don't know what it means, Master Jack. We never heard of it in our island."

"Well, it's nothing good to eat, Bogy, so it doesn't matter."

When they got back to Harry they found him much worse. His leg had swelled considerably, and he seemed feverish, so Bogy and Peko at once started off in search of a plant which they said would heal the wound, leaving Jack to act as nurse.

"Good chaps, those natives," said Harry. "I say, it would be jolly if they would build a canoe. We could go round to the islands and get no end of curios."

"Bother the curios, Harry; I want to let my mother know that I am all right, for they're bound to send a message home from the ship to say that we were drowned."

"I never thought of that; but anyway a canoe would be a good thing to have, for we could get over to some place and get a ship."

"Of course we could; but I think the gig can be patched up. Here comes Bogy with a bundle of leaves of some sort, which ought to put your gamy leg in tip-top order. Come along, Bogy; plaster them on and get him all right. He's a bad patient, so the sooner we get him well, the better for all hands."

"These will cure him," said Bogy, as he applied the leaves; "he will be better tomorrow, and quite well in a day or two."

"If he is, I'll recommend you for a doctor's certificate, Bogy, and Peko as your assistant. Now go to sleep, Harry, and let the leaves do their work, and thank your stars that you've got a leg to be bad, for remember we were very nearly being made roast pork of."

"I haven't forgotten, Jack; neither do I forget to Whom we owe our lives. Just pat those two chaps on the back, for they're downright good fellows; and if ever I get home again, I'll send them out such a cargo of knives and cutlasses as will last them for a lifetime, and help them to protect themselves against such people as Tom Hackett and his crew."

CHAPTER XII

A DERELICT CANOE

FOR a whole week our heroes took things easy, recuperating after their long voyage in the boat. Harry's leg rapidly got better, and he was soon enabled to make excursions into the island, where they lazed most of the days away under the delightful shade of the luxurious trees ; but beautiful as the island was, they soon got tired of doing nothing, and they determined one night that on the following morning they would set to work to repair the boat. It was decided that Peko should make a voyage in her by himself to his own island, as it was not deemed safe either for Bogy or the boys to venture amongst the natives until they had had it explained to them that they were perfectly innocent of the kidnapping. For though the natives of Bogy's island had for some time had intercourse with the outer world, and were getting more or less civilised through the labour of the missionaries, yet the treacherous

behaviour of the schooner's crew was quite sufficient to throw them back into a state of barbarism, and make them distrust, and even be revenged, on any European who might fall into their hands.

Peko said he felt sure that he could explain all to their satisfaction if he returned alone. He could then come back and fetch the rest of them, and then Jack and Harry would be able to get a ship, as vessels called occasionally at the island, either for wood and water, or to barter knives and other manufactured articles for copra.¹

Besides cocoa-nuts, yams, bread-fruit, and other vegetation, there was an abundance of fish, which the two natives were experts in catching, so that our heroes found the food they got on this uninhabited island was far superior to that which they had been accustomed to on board ship; but in spite of the easy life they could live if they stayed on the island, they longed to get again amongst their own countrymen. And they set to work to repair their boat with the utmost zest, but it was slow work, as they had no proper tools, though the

¹ The kernel of the cocoa-nut, broken into small pieces. Of great value in European markets.

two natives were equal to the occasion. They plaited a mat which, being tightly rolled, was stuffed into the hole and fastened securely. The boat rode very light with only one occupant, and as the stove planks were forward when Peko was seated in the stern, there was little fear of her leaking. As soon as she was water-tight, they made a new mast and matting sail; this took them several days. All being ready, Peko took the boat outside the reef to try her sailing powers. She went very well, and made but little water. The next thing was to provision her; this was easy, as a few cocoa-nuts, some bread-fruit, and bananas were all that he required. He had no fear of starving, as there were numerous islands on which he could get food should he run short during his voyage. Peko reckoned that with a fair wind he would reach his island in about three days, and as soon as he could arrange matters he would return to his companions. He considered that, with a fair amount of luck, he would be back to them within a fortnight, or at the most three weeks. If he found that it would be dangerous for Bogy and the boys to come, he would endeavour to bring some of Bogy's and his own relatives back

with him, and they could then settle on the new island.

Next morning at daylight he started, Jack, Harry, and Bogy accompanying him as far as the barrier reef, where they watched the boat until she was but a tiny speck upon the horizon. Then plunging into the water, they swam to the shore.

For the first day or so they missed Peko considerably. He had learnt a little English, and had kept them in roars of laughter with his quaint expressions; he had also proved himself a sterling good fellow, and they felt quite dull without him.

They soon found life on the island exceedingly monotonous, and longed for work, but all things necessary for their existence grew on the trees, and they only had to lift their hands to gather it. Their great occupation was fishing, and they spent hours every day at this. They would have built a canoe, only they had no tools. Bogy had started making a stone axe, but it was slow and tedious work. They had no chance of making the canoe until the axe was finished, so he kept on steadily at work grinding one stone against another.

It was about three weeks after Peko had

left, and they were anxiously looking out for his return, when one morning Harry spied a small object floating in the sea, about a mile outside the barrier reef. At first he thought it was Peko returning with the boat, and his excited yells brought the others to where he was standing.

"Look!" cried Harry. "He's up to time. He said three weeks, and here he comes! Hurrah!"

Bogy, after taking a careful look at the object, said, "No, Master Harry, that is not Peko. It is a canoe, but there is no one in it; it is bottom up."

"Oh, if we could only get it," shouted the boys together, "it would be splendid; but it is too far out."

"I will swim to it," said Bogy, "and bring it in."

"I'll come with you," cried Jack. "I can manage a mile or so easily."

"No, Master Jack, stop where you are. I can manage better by myself. It is too far for you to swim."

"All right, perhaps it is. Now off you go, Bogy, and look as sharp as you can."

The tide was rising, and the canoe was setting in towards the shore, but she would

probably miss the island, so Bogy plunging in swam off towards her.

The boys stood on the reef and watched him. He seemed an interminable time in getting to her, but at last they had the satisfaction of seeing him climb on to her bottom, and direct her course towards the shore.

"O Jack! won't it be stunning to be able to cruise about again? But I hope it's not Peko's canoe; perhaps she's capsized and he's drowned."

"I hope not. I never thought of that. But Bogy says his countrymen never get drowned. We shall soon see. Doesn't he make good way?—he's got no paddle. These chaps are just like fish. See, he's using his legs as a propeller."

"Fish don't have legs, Jack; at least I've never seen any with them."

"Well, his fins, if you are so mighty particular."

"Men don't have fins."

"Don't talk rot, Harry. Hallo! he's turned her over."

Bogy had succeeded in righting the craft, though it was only for a minute, for she turned completely round; but when he again climbed

on to her, the boys saw that he was in possession of a paddle, and he now brought her rapidly towards the reef. The boys in their excitement plunged into the sea and swam to meet him.

"Is she Peko's?" inquired Jack, as he came up to her.

"No, she was not built on our island."

"She's a good size, anyway; we'll be able to sail her anywhere."

As Bogy was leaving Jack a good way astern, he had to leave off talking and follow up as quickly as possible. The canoe was soon safely within the lagoon, and was hauled up on the beach by the time the boys arrived.

"Why, she's just like the canoe the natives were in who captured us!" exclaimed Harry. "I believe she is one of them."

"Yes, she is one," said Bogy. "See, she has several spear-holes through her! They were probably all killed on their expedition."

"Serve them jolly well right," said Jack; "but it's thoughtful of the craft to come our way. It's trying to atone for the sins of its former owners by doing us a service. Do you think we can mend her, Bogy?"

"Oh, yes; she will be no trouble to mend,

Master Jack. To-morrow we'll get her all ready for sea ; but we must make a mast and sail."

"All right ; we'll soon get her shipshape, and then we'll go for a long cruise."

The canoe was not seriously damaged. She had two spear-holes in her side, but they were just below the gunwale, so they did not make her leak. Bogy thought it probable that her crew had formed part of the expedition that they had fallen in with, and that they, being repulsed, had tried to get away ; but having all been killed or wounded, the canoe, most probably having her sail set, and with no one to manage her, capsized. Her outrigger was broken short off, so that there had been nothing to keep her steady, and she had consequently been drifting about until descried by Harry.

It took longer to get her ready for sea than Bogy had anticipated, and a full week had elapsed before they had got a new outrigger fixed, and then the mast and sails had not been begun. They did not wait for these, but took her at once out into open water, where Bogy gave his companions instructions in the art of using the paddle. She went capitally, and the boys very quickly learnt how to manage her.

"I think," said Jack, as they sat down to their evening meal, "that we might take tomorrow as a holiday. There is no hurry about the sail; for if we went away for a few days' cruise, and Peko returned and found us gone, he would go back to his island thinking we were all dead or something of the kind. We must wait a month, at the least, before we go far away, and we shall have ample time to make the sail before then. So I propose we paddle a few miles away from the island early in the morning and return at night. What say you?"

"That's the very thing," said Harry; "besides which we might fall in with some vessel. Anyway, it would give us a good day's practice in canoeing."

"I don't think there's much chance of falling in with a vessel; they seem pretty scarce about here. But we'll provision the canoe for two days, in case of accidents."

Having made all the necessary arrangements for starting at daylight, they stretched themselves out on some mats which Bogy had made for them from dried leaves, and were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GHASTLY DISCOVERY.

THE sun and Jack rose together.

"Come along, you chaps; man the windlass!" shouted the latter, whilst the former shed its glorious rays over sea and land.

"Come along, rouse up! It's a dead calm."

Harry and Bogy were on their feet in a minute. It was very seldom that Bogy required any rousing; he was generally awake long before the others, and had surveyed the surrounding ocean and got breakfast ready before he roused them; but Jack was so keen on this expedition, that it had made him wakeful.

Running down to the shore, the three plunged into the sea for their morning's swim. Then, after a hasty breakfast, they carried a good supply of cocoa-nuts, bread-fruit, bananas, and some shell-fish down to the canoe.

"That's enough to last us for three days if anything happens to keep us from returning ;

but it looks fine enough, so I expect we'll be back to-night," said Jack.

"Why, how far are you thinking of going, Jack? One would think you were tired of our island and society. Perhaps you want to fall in with some natives who'll sacrifice you. One shave is quite enough for me; I propose that we don't go far out to sea."

"I don't want to go far, Harry, so don't alarm yourself. I only want to test the seaworthiness of the canoe, and thoroughly learn how to manage her."

"Well, you won't get much chance in a dead calm; but if you're ready, come on, we're both waiting for you."

The canoe with its occupants was soon outside the reef, and the island being low, quickly sank out of sight, only the top of the lofty cocoa-nut palms being visible. The day was absolutely faultless, the sea as smooth as a mill-pond, and the canoe cut her way through the deep-blue water under Bogy's dexterous paddling at a great rate.

"Isn't it jolly to be afloat again?" said Jack after a time. "I'm awfully sick of the island."

"You might be in many a worse place—inside one of those savages, for instance. Now, I'm going to have a spell at the paddle, Bogy is taking us along too fast. Hand it over, and stand by to give me a lesson, there's a good chap; and I advise you to be ready for a swim, Jack, in case I capsize her."

"I expect you'll do that, Harry, only don't if you can help it, as we should lose all our provisions. You take five minutes, and then let me have a spell."

As the morning wore on the day became very hot, and made them long for a breeze, but they kept steadily on, taking turn and turn about at the paddle, until they could make the craft go nearly as fast as Bogy.

It was about mid-day, and they were thinking of going about so as to be back to the island before dark, when Jack, who was taking a careful look round in the hope of seeing a sail, spied a small dark object in the water on the edge of the horizon.

"I do believe I see a vessel," he said with suppressed excitement.

"Where?" inquired his companions.

"Yes, I'm nearly sure it is. Look, just on

the horizon. Bogy, you have good eyes, take a decko."

"I see something, Master Jack; it is very likely another island, but it is very small."

"Well, we'll go and see. Here, take the paddle, you make her travel faster than we do. It won't take us long to see what it is, so give way."

The canoe flew through the calm water under the strong and skilful management of Bogy, but the object which they were steering for, instead of becoming more distinct as they got nearer, faded from view as a slight haze rose in that part of the ocean and shut it out of sight.

Harry was for turning back, but Jack insisted on going on, for he argued that, if it were another island they could stop there for the night, and if it were a vessel—well, all the better! Bogy quite agreed with him that, as they had come so far, it was best to go on. Though the boys kept a bright look-out, it was not until a good two hours had passed in hard paddling that they were able to discern anything. Then a curious sight met their gaze: the mist suddenly lifting disclosed to view an atoll—that is, a circular reef of coral, in which is enclosed a

shallow lagoon. On one part of this reef was the after-part of a ship.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Jack. "Here's a find."

Bogy had ceased paddling, and the canoe drifted slowly towards the reef and the wreck.

Not a tree or shrub of any kind grew on the reef. In fact, it was so low that it was probable that it would be submerged at very high tides, and that the waves would beat over it during stormy weather.

They approached cautiously, fearing to strike on submerged rocks, but the water was clear and deep, and at last they landed on the reef without accident.

"Doesn't she look desolate?" said Jack, as they came up to her. "She must have been here a long time; she's broken right in two."

The vessel, or rather the portion of her that remained, was firmly fixed in a huge wedge of coral. Her foremost part seemed to have broken or been washed away by the ceaseless beating of the waves; it seemed strange that her stern should have remained, and they concluded that she had been dismasted and driven ashore stern first. Long weeds and shells

adhered to her sides, and it was evident that she had been for some time in her desolate position. There was no name on her stern, and all her ornamental work had been washed away.

"Now, how are we to get aboard?" said Jack, after they had taken a careful survey of her from the outside. "Oh! I see; there is a bit of her main or mizzen chain left—I don't know which, for I can't tell whether she was a brig, barque, or ship."

"A brig, I should say by the look of her stern—an old Geordie brig; look how square it is," said Harry.

"Yes, I expect she was, but it doesn't matter. Just hoist me up so that I can catch hold of that chain plate, and I'll be aboard in half a jiff."

Bogy caught hold of one of Jack's legs and Harry the other.

"Now then, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Heave, then!"

Jack got such a hoist that he had no need to catch hold of the chain plate, for it landed him right on deck.

"Stay where you are," he shouted, "and I'll

see if I can find any rope; it isn't over nice to be chucked up like a cricket ball."

Not a vestige of anything was to be seen about the deck, with the exception of the companion and the cabin skylight, over which was lashed a tarpaulin, now covered thickly with weeds and barnacles. There was also the stump of a mast broken off short to the deck. It was truly a desolate place, and Jack's heart rather failed him as he walked aft, and heard his footsteps echo with a strange hollow sound on the deserted slippery deck.

"I think I'll get the others aboard before I explore further," he thought. "It's rather uncanny here, though they are so close by. I suppose the lashing round the tarpaulin is rotten, but I'll try it."

Pulling out his sheath-knife he severed it. It had been a strong piece of tarry rattling-line in its day, but was now bleached white, and covered with shells. Giving it a jerk he hauled it clear, and going to the side, hove the end over to his companions.

"Here! see if this will bear your weight. I expect it's rotten, so be careful," he shouted, as he made the end fast in the chain.

Harry tested it by swinging on it with all his weight.

"It's as sound as a bell, Jack. Now then, Bogy, stand under me in case it parts."

Up he came, until Jack was able to seize him by the collar and haul him on deck. As soon as he was safely landed, Bogy followed, and the three then made their way to the skylight and cast off the tarpaulin. Then, with a feeling of awe, they peered down into the cabin, which had been in darkness and untenanted for—well, they could not tell how long!

"I say, Jack, who's going to be the first to go down?" said Harry. "It doesn't look very inviting, does it? Look at the mould on the table. I wonder how long she's been here."

"I was the first to come aboard," answered Jack, "so I'll lead the way down. But mind, you chaps follow."

"Of course we will; but I wish we had some arms."

"Arms! What for? I don't suppose you'll find anything living, unless it is a barnacle. Come on."

The doors of the companion-hatch were

open, and the boys went down the slimy ladder, leaving Bogy at the top to act as a sort of reserve in case they wanted assistance.

"I say, Jack, there's a rum smell down here," said Harry, as they reached the bottom of the ladder. "I hope there arn't any corpses."

"It's only damp; you are an awful funk. Come on. Look, the sun is shining through the skylight now the tarpaulin is off. I call it no end of a place."

"That's true enough; for if you kicked the bulkhead in, you would come to the sea."

The cabin presented the appearance which most cabins do on small crafts. In the after-part was the captain's state-room, and on either side were the doors of two berths, whilst forward on the starboard side was the steward's pantry.

The bright afternoon sun shone down through the dulled and dirty skylight, illuminating this silent abode of mould and damp. Its cheery rays encouraged the explorers to throw open the doors of the berths.

"Now, then, for it!" said Jack, as he turned the handle of the door of the captain's state-room. "Stand by!"

The place was almost in darkness, long weeds and shells having grown over the ports to such an extent as to exclude the light.

"I wish we had a match," said Jack, as he entered. "Come in, Harry; our eyes will soon get accustomed to the darkness."

"Not I! I'll just go up and tell Bogy to scrape away the weeds from the ports. There may be a corpse."

"Well, suppose there is? It won't hurt you."

"I know that; but I have no wish to break my shins over one. Hi, Bogy! see if you can pull some of the weeds away right aft on the starboard side. They block the ports."

"Ay! ay!" answered Bogy, and he began scraping away at the ship's side.

"Jack, I don't mind telling you, I'm in a mortal funk. This place seems like a tomb. I think I'll go on deck and help Bogy."

"Harry, you're an ass! Suppose there is a dead man! He can't hurt you; it will only be the skeleton of some honest old shellback."

"That may be; but I don't like the job."

"All right; go on deck, and send Bogy down. I would sooner have him than you."

At that moment there was a sound of a loud splash, and a flood of sunlight shone through the port, lighting up the berth.

‘How is that?’ shouted Bogy. “Can you see now?”

“Yes; that’s all right! Go farther forrard, and scrape away there! Now, come on, Harry; you see there’s not a living soul here.”

“Well, I didn’t expect there was,” answered Harry, as he boldly entered, now that the place was no longer in darkness.

The state-room had one bunk in it and a small settee, also a small table on which was an inkstand and a log-book—unfortunately the book was mere pulp, owing to the damp, and the writing in it was quite undecipherable. Over the table were a row of racks in which were placed charts; these were covered with mildew. The boys did not unroll them, as they wished to explore further before darkness set in above them. A mariner’s compass swung from the upper deck; there was also a swinging lamp, and a good seaman’s mahogany chest stood in one corner, but there was no name on it.

“Well, Harry, there’s not much worth

having here except the charts and compass. I dare say there's a sextant and a few books stowed away somewhere. We'll look for them by-and-by. But, hallo! here's a find! Look! one, two, three, four guns. Now, if there's only some ammunition, we're all right."

The guns were in a rack behind the door, and it was only when Jack gave it a shove to, that he saw them.

"That's splendid!" cried Harry, as he pulled one down; "now we can fight any of the savages if we get attacked. Let's open the chest."

"Not now; there are four more berths to explore, as well as the steward's pantry. We can come back here when we have looked into them."

"Below there!" shouted Bogy down the companion.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"There's a breeze springing up, Master Jack. How long will you be?"

"Oh, a long time yet! It's not much, is it?"

"No, it has not got here yet, but I can see it coming along."

"Well, this place is safe enough; which way is it blowing?"

"Right off our island."

"Oh, confound it! we'll have a trouble to get back. I'll come on deck in a minute."

By the time they had ascended the companion ladder, the breeze was upon them. It was light, but was a dead head wind.

"We had better stop here for the night, Bogy. We can haul the canoe over the reef; she'll ride all right in the lagoon, even if it comes on to blow, which is not likely."

"All right, Master Jack. The ship must have been here a long time, so we are not likely to take harm if we stay for a night, and we have plenty of provisions."

"Of course we have. Now, you see how thoughtful I was, Harry; if we hadn't brought anything with us, we should have had to go back to-night. Now, we can stay. Do you think you can light a fire, Bogy?"

"I'll try, Master Jack, but I think the wood on this vessel is too damp to catch."

"Well, try, there's a good chap. We have a lot to do before dark, and the sun is getting low now. Some of the skylight is rotten; try that."

"I will, but I must first get down into the

canoe and see if I can find an opening in the reef, and take her into the lagoon."

"Ay, ay. We'll go below again whilst you do that."

The boys once more descended into the dreary solitude of the cabin, whilst Bogy went down the rope on to the reef to try to find a safe berth for the canoe for the night.

"Now then, Harry, we'll begin here at this one, which is probably the mate's," said Jack, as he opened the door of the first berth, "and go right round and finish up with the steward's pantry. Ah! I thought this was the mate's; you see I'm right—two bunks, the bottom one like a sort of bosun's locker, balls of spun yarn, rattling line, marline-spike and bolts of canvas; nothing else worth having, unless there is anything in his chest. Poor beggar! I wonder what became of him? The rope and canvas will come in handy anyway. Now for the next."

The other three berths were explored in turn, but only one seemed to have been occupied; the other two appeared to have been used as store-rooms, or rather one as a store-room and the other as a sail-locker.

"Well, there's a good suit of sails as far as I

can see," said Jack, as they finished their examination of the fourth berth; "but what they'll be like when they're unrolled is another matter; I expect they'll be rotten."

"It doesn't much matter if they are, for they will be no good to us without a ship," said Harry; "but now for the pantry."

"You seem mighty keen over that; do you expect to find a plum-duff or a sea pie?"

"Neither, old chap; but it's getting dark, and I want to get on deck."

This door was not shut as the others had been, but was only half closed. Harry was in front, and pushed it open.

"Oh!" he yelled. "Look! Jack, isn't it awful?"

Jack pushed past him, but the moment after recoiled, and the two made their way as fast as possible up the companion.

"My stars! it did give me a turn."

"And me too; but it's only a skeleton. Poor chap! let's come back and examine it."

"Not now, Jack, it's getting dark. Hallo! there's Bogy with a fire blazing. He's a good sort. Let's go down on to the reef, and leave further exploration until to-morrow."

"All right. The sun will set before long. But think of that poor chap dying all alone, probably of starvation, and our island so close."

"Yes, it seems a pity, but I suppose he had no boat. Now for the shore. I'll go first, Jack, as you led the way. My stars! it did give me a fright."

"I see I have to act as advance-guard when boarding, and rear-guard on disembarking. It's a good thing that you're not as frightened of living men as you are of the dead."

"I would sooner face a hundred of the savages than I would stop half-an-hour alone with the skeleton, Jack. It did look awful. I wonder what his yarn was."

The boys quickly joined Bogy at the fire. "Well, what did you find, Master Jack? I think something not good, you came over the side so fast."

"We have found a lot of things, Bogy, mostly good, but there is a skeleton in the steward's pantry. We did not examine it, as it was getting dark."

Bogy laughed. "I would sooner be all night with a skeleton, Master Jack, than on the schooner again."

"Oh yes! you fellows don't mind that kind of thing, but I'm blessed if I like it; if you hadn't got the fire going here, I should propose that we camped on the other side of the reef right away from the wreck."

The breeze which had sprung up increased somewhat at sunset, and our heroes, after having had their vegetarian supper, lay down to rest. It was a long time before Jack could go to sleep. He could not take his eyes off the wreck, which loomed up like a black monster. The soft pale light of the stars, and the gentle lapping of the waves on the reef, and the silent skeleton all alone in the steward's pantry, supplied good themes for reflection, and it must have been near midnight when he closed his eyes and went to sleep. But even then it was only to dream of the solitary wreck, with its ghastly occupant.

CHAPTER XIV

A GOOD CARGO

WHEN Bogy and Harry woke next morning, Jack was sound asleep, snoring like a pig.

"Here, rouse up, Jack!" cried Harry, giving him a punch in the ribs. "You were mighty sharp yesterday morning in getting me up; now it's my turn."

After a good swim and breakfast they again climbed aboard the wreck, Bogy accompanying them. With a feeling of awe, or, as Jack termed it, "blue funk," they descended the companion ladder.

"Now then," said Jack, "I'm going straight into the dead man's berth, so don't get hanging back."

The door of the pantry was just as they had left it on the previous night, which fact seemed to surprise Harry.

"Why, you don't suppose that a skeleton would get up and shut the door because we had left it open, do you?"

"No, but are you sure we did leave it open?"

"I know that I didn't shut it, and you couldn't have done, as you were up the companion in a brace of shakes."

Jack was the first to enter the chamber of death, Harry and Bogy following close behind.

The skeleton was seated on the top of a locker. His legs were drawn up, and his chin rested on his knees. There was still some hair on his head, and portions of clothes were left, but the greater part of them had disappeared; on the locker by his side was a long knife, such as cooks have for cutting meat.

It was a truly ghastly spectacle, and for some minutes they stood looking at it without speaking; but at last Jack remarked, "Hadn't we better bury him?"

"He'll break if you touch him," said Harry, evidently wanting to get out of the job of handling it.

"No, we'll get a plank, or better still, there are plenty of blankets in the other berths; we'll sew it in a blanket and put it overboard; but I wonder what became of his clothes?"

Bogy was now examining the skeleton closely.

"They've been eaten by rats, Master Jack."

"Poor chap! What a miserable death he must have died! It couldn't have been from starvation, for here are some old mouldy biscuits. It might have been from thirst. But we shall never know, so let's get him decently buried as soon as possible."

A blanket was procured from out of the mate's berth, and they carefully put all that now remained of what had once been a human being into it. As they were doing this, Jack noticed a small piece of paper clenched in the right hand. It was only a tiny scrap, but he seized it eagerly, hoping it would give some clue. It was so discoloured that nothing could be made out of it, though, after careful examination, they could see that there had been something written on it, which was quite undecipherable.

"That will tell us nothing, so let's get him on deck, and then drop him into deep water; we'll take him out a little way in the canoe."

In half-an-hour's time they had buried this unknown mariner and were back on the wreck, busily engaged in giving the vessel a thorough

overhauling, bringing all things that would be useful to them on the island on deck.

The best find they had was a chest of carpenter's tools and two boxes of ammunition ; the latter, in spite of having been so long in a damp place, was perfectly good, as it had been packed in strong boxes and hermetically sealed in block tin. This was, indeed, a valuable discovery, for it would not only enable them to protect themselves if attacked, but also to shoot birds. Both the boys were longing for something more substantial than cocoa-nuts, bread-fruit, etc. Certainly they had had a good deal of fish, but they were getting tired of that, and the flesh of a bird, even if it were ever so coarse, would prove a great boon to them.

They had to spend another night on the atoll, owing to the breeze being too strong for them to venture with a heavily-laden canoe.

They were most desirous of taking the ammunition, arms, and tools, but on consideration they found that it would be safer to leave one box of ammunition on the wreck, as, if the canoe were too deep, she would probably ship

some water, and they could not afford the chance of spoiling any of their but too limited stock.

"We'll have to make another journey for this box," said Jack; "it's been here long enough, so it's not likely to run away. Besides, I should like by degrees to get everything off the wreck; we might build a vessel in time, then think how handy the sails and other gear would come in!"

"Just as you like," answered Harry; "but if we wait here for an absolutely calm day, I don't see why we shouldn't take all the ammunition as one cargo. Suppose some vessels sight the wreck, they would be sure to board her, and away goes all our chance of shooting the birds, for they would be certain to take the ammunition."

"Why, we'll be back in two or three days, so it's not very likely that a vessel will come this way during that time; at least, it will be a rum thing if one does, considering that the wreck must have been here a couple of years at the least, and probably much longer."

"Well, I still say, let's wait until we can take the lot."

"We can't. We've hardly a day's supply of provisions left. If you like to stop, you can, but I'm not going to, and Bogy says he won't stay."

"Me stop by myself? Rather not!" said Harry. "I would sooner see all the ammunition at the bottom of the sea. The very thought of it gives me the creeps."

"Well, lend me a hand to stow the box back where it came from, and then we'll make a start."

"Oh, we needn't take it below again; just put it inside the companion."

"Ay, ay! anywhere you like, but I'd wager if we didn't come back for a year, we should find it in the same place."

It was about eight o'clock in the morning before they were ready to start. The sea was still rather lumpy, but the canoe made excellent way, and the atoll with the dreary wreck was soon out of sight.


They paddled as hard as they could, relieving each other often, as they were anxious to make their island as early as possible, and to get their valuable cargo landed before dark; besides the box of ammunition and the car-

penter's tools, they had brought a coil of rope, some knives, a looking-glass, and several pots and tins, which they had found in the locker on which the skeleton had been seated.

"Won't be over-pleasant using them," said Harry, when it was first proposed to bring them, "but they will do well to boil the birds and fish in."

"I should rather think they would. Why, I wouldn't leave them if a whole regiment of skeletons had been piled up on the top of the locker, let alone one decent old sailor."

The sun was getting low when the island was sighted, and sank below the horizon just as they passed through the opening in the barrier-reef.

"Now then, Bogy, jump out and get us some supper ready," shouted Jack, as the nose of the canoe touched the shore. "Harry and I will unload her, and bring the stuff up under the trees, and to-morrow we will see if we can't shoot some birds. We've plenty of kettles to boil them in." 

All being thoroughly tired after their long excursion, they made a hearty supper, and were soon snoozing as comfortably as if they were in a cosy bed with four walls round them.

CHAPTER XV

A FIERCE BATTLE

THE boys were astir early next morning, and after a plunge in the lagoon, and a hasty breakfast, they set to work to examine and clean their firearms. They found them somewhat rusty, but having been well oiled they were not hard to clean.

"Only two shots each, Harry," said Jack, "for we must not waste our ammunition."

"All right, but if we don't hit anything, of course we must go on until we do."

"Yes, of course, but we ought not to make any muff shots, as the birds are so tame, though I don't suppose they will be after we have commenced firing."

They had just loaded their guns, and were ready to pot at a most beautiful bird which had perched on a cocoa-nut tree close over their heads, when they heard Bogy, who had swum out to the reef, shouting to them, "Master Jack! Master Harry! the canoes. Come and look."

The boys hastened down to the shore opposite to where he was standing.

"It's Peko and his friends," cried Bogy excitedly; "they are in two canoes. Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see; I hope it is Peko, though. It may be some of the savages."

"No, it is Peko, I know by the look of the canoes."

"Well, in case it isn't, we'll load all the rifles, so as to give them a reception if they mean mischief. I should have thought Peko would have returned in our boat."

"No, Master Jack, they can manage the canoes better."

In the excitement of watching the canoes, the boys left the birds unmolested. There was a nice breeze blowing, and the two crafts rapidly approached the island.

"Well, Bogy, are you sure they are your countrymen?" inquired Jack, when they were close enough for the occupants to be discerned.

"Yes, Master Jack, I am sure. But there are only two men in each, so even if they weren't, they could not harm us."

"That's a blessing, for we don't want to waste our ammunition. See, they are shaping

a course to leeward of the island ; they mean to come in through the opening where our canoe is. You stay where you are, Bogy, whilst Harry and I go round. Let us know if you can recognise Peko, for if you can we'll swim out to the reef and meet them."

In a short time Bogy came running to where they were standing, shouting, "Yes, it is Peko, he has seen me ;" and plunging into the lagoon, he swam out to meet his friend, followed by the two boys.

No one who has not experienced being cut off from his fellow-creatures can know the joy of again meeting them. Though the new arrivals were of a different colour and language from the boys, yet they felt almost as much delight as did Bogy. Peko and Bogy were soon engaged in an animated conversation in their own language, the other three natives joining in.

"There seems something exciting on," said Harry ; "see how they gesticulate. I suppose we'll hear directly what it is about."

"Here, Bogy, tell them to pull ashore. What's all the commotion?"

"War, Master Jack, war," answered Bogy, his eyes glittering with excitement.

They were soon all seated comfortably under the cocoa-nut trees, where they had found Peko sleeping the morning after they came ashore. The natives carried on an animated conversation for some time, but the boys were unable to understand a single word, so they had to wait patiently until there was a lull, when they asked Bogy to tell them the news.

He spun them a long yarn—how his countrymen had been attacked by the natives of a powerful neighbouring island, and, though they had succeeded in driving them off, they were in constant dread of their returning in larger numbers

Peko had arrived just in time to take part in the battle, and as soon as it was over had been despatched with a message asking the boys to come and help in case of a further attack, for the natives had great faith in the powers and skill of Englishmen, and trusted that the boys might devise some plan of defeating the enemy.

"That will be splendid," said Harry, when Bogy had finished speaking. "Just fancy, Jack, we'll be real alive generals, and won't the guns come in handy? We must go back to the wreck and get the remainder. All right,

Bogy, we'll come. We'll start to-morrow; shall we, Jack?"

"Yes, I'm quite ready now," answered Jack, "but I expect Peko and his chums want a rest. Do you think they'd be ready by to-morrow, Bogy?"

"Oh yes, they will be ready; they'll go to sleep now, and then they'll be quite fresh by the morning."

The natives were delighted when they heard that the boys would accompany them, and especially when they were told that there were more arms and ammunition to be got from the wreck.

At the first streak of dawn on the following morning the little party started for the wreck. There was a good sailing breeze, and the canoes flew through the water at a great pace, and the friendly island was soon out of sight.

"I feel quite home-sick at leaving it," said Harry. "I propose we come back as soon as this war is over. If we bring back some natives we can form a colony, get some traders to call, make our fortunes, and then go home. Won't that be jolly?"

"Yes, but if I get a chance I'll take the first ship I can home, and let the natives look after the island."

Jack had been thinking much of his mother, who he knew would be grieving for him as dead, and he felt for her in her lonely position. He would not have minded so much if he could have communicated with her in order that she might know that he was still in the land of the living, and would in all probability some day return ; but he felt that when she got the news of the loss of the boat, she would abandon all hope of seeing him again, and the thought of her sorrow cut him to the heart. It was not so bad for Harry, as he had left a lot of brothers and sisters as well as his father at home, so his loss would be less felt in the family circle.

About noon they hove in sight of the atoll, and shortly after were once more on the reef and aboard the solitary wreck.

The canoes were soon laden with the remainder of the ammunition and the guns, together with some cutlasses which they found in the captain's state-room in an old chest. They were evidently of rather an ancient date, the wreck herself having probably been launched in the old days when it was customary for merchant ships to carry arms, and, like many other vessels of a similar date, she had still continued to carry them, though no longer

likely to be required whilst trading with civilised ports, though handy amongst the suspicious and sometimes treacherous inhabitants of the South Seas.

The natives were very anxious to proceed on their voyage, as they dreaded that any delay might make them too late to render assistance to their countrymen. The boys put no obstacles in the way of an immediate start, though the sun was getting low in the heavens, for they considered that they would be just as comfortable during the night in the canoes as they would be if they camped on the reef; besides, they were almost as anxious to arrive in time to render assistance to their shipmates' countrymen as the natives were themselves. Both the boys felt quite sure of victory now that they were so amply armed. Bogy assured them that the enemy would fly in terror as soon as they were fired upon. They had in the canoes in all fifteen guns, so they would be able to keep a relay always loaded.

Before leaving the reef the boys loaded them all, firing each one off in turn in order to test it. Peko and his companions were astonished at the result of the first shot, which brought down a bird which was flying at a

distance of about forty yards. They had all seen firearms before, though they had never seen them discharged, and when they had got over the first astonishment they were filled with enthusiasm, as they felt sure that their foe would not stand long before such deadly weapons, and they pressed Bogy to get the boys to embark as quickly as possible.

"They seem all right," said Jack, as he discharged the last one and handed it to Bogy to stow away. "So I think we can start now without much fear, even if we should fall in with the enemy."

The canoes were well away from the atoll when darkness came on, and speeding before a fair wind towards the much-loved home of the dusky mariners who navigated them.

For two days the wind remained fairly steady, and they were in the hope of completing their voyage about noon on the following day, but during the night the breeze died away, and they had to take to paddling, which was much slower than sailing, so they feared they would not make the island until night, when it would be impossible to land, as a vigilant look-out would be kept for the enemy, and any one approaching during the darkness would

have to run the gantlet of a hundred arrows and spears.

"We mustn't run the risk of getting killed by our friends," said Jack to Bogy, who had been explaining the situation ; "we must hang about until daylight, if we should make the island during the night."

"That is so, Master Jack ; besides, it may have been captured before now and in the hands of the enemy, and then we shall all get roasted."

"Oh, lor ! we've had one narrow squeak from that ; I for one don't want another. I say, what brutes you all are in this part of the world, Bogy, and yet you all seem tame enough when one gets to know you."

"My people know no better until they meet missionaries. Then they are good ; better than some white people that call at the island."

"That's true enough," answered Jack mus- ingly, as he thought of the schooner with her rascally crew. "It's no wonder that the mis- sionaries have a job with these natives when such blackguards as Tom Hackett come cruising about. It's a wonder that any of them get converted at all."

It remained perfectly calm all that night and next day, but the natives kept on steadily

paddling. Just before sunset Peko was taking a look round when he spied something in the water. It was a long way off, and very indistinct. The natives left off paddling to look, but the object was so far away that it was some time before they could make out anything at all. Peko, who was blessed with extraordinary good sight, insisted that he could see a canoe; the others did at last make out something, but could not say what it was. After a long confabulation, they said they would take Peko's word for it, and consider the object a canoe, and not only an ordinary one, but one belonging to the enemy.

"That's right," said Jack, when Bogy had explained to him the nature of their conversation, "there is nothing like being prepared for emergencies. We'll have everything ready in case it is the enemy. We'll get all the guns loaded, and mind that nobody touches them. Tell your chums, Bogy, that they'll go off if they only look at them."

"They will not touch them, Master Jack, you need not fear."

They paddled on silently until about midnight, when the quick hearing of one of the

natives detected the noise of surf breaking on a reef.

"It is the island," said Bogy with excitement.

"Just fancy, Jack," remarked Harry, who had been sitting for some time meditating, "these fellows think of this as home just as much as we do of London River; I'm glad I'm not a South Sea Islander."

"Many a worse thing, Harry; I think they have a jolly, comfortable time of it. It's better than living in Labrador."

"I don't know about that. You do get some good old Channel fogs in that part which would remind you of home."

"That's a sensible remark, worthy of a Britisher who thinks nobody has a home but himself. Why, you don't suppose if you had been born in the tropics that a Channel fog would make you feel homely, do you?"

"I forgot that, Jack. But, any way, give me a good old sou'-westerly breeze with a Scotch mist hanging about as thick as a hedge, if I'm to feel that I'm getting near home."

The two canoes paddled about waiting for daybreak. Nobody slept. The natives were too anxious, as they had a dread foreboding that

their island might be in the hands of the enemy and the boys were in a fever of excitement at the idea of a fight, for they had no notion of going back without trying what effect their fire-arms would have on the invaders, even if they were already in possession of the island.

The grey dawn of morning was just stealing over the face of the calm waters, and what appeared to be a heavy black bank of clouds hung on the horizon (which in reality was the island looming up in the gathering light of day), when the occupants of the canoes were startled by most unearthly yelling.

"They're attacking," cried Bogy. "O Master Jack, we're in time!"

He then shouted something to his other companions in their native tongue. It was evidently an exhortation for them to paddle as hard as they could, but it was quite unnecessary, as the canoes were literally flying through the water, and the natives were straining every nerve to keep up the pace.

"Now, Bogy," said Jack calmly, "you load the guns as fast as ever we fire them, and I'll back we'll make them sheer off and leave your people alone in a brace of shakes."

"I will, Master Jack; I know how to

load. Look, there they are; they have landed."

"My word, there are a good dose of them!" cried Harry; "over fifteen canoes, I know."

"Oh, we can dust them," said Jack. "Now then. Avast pulling! Bogy, tell them."

Jack and Harry took a careful aim. Bang, bang! went the guns; down fell two fierce warriors.

"Keep it going, Harry, only take good aim, and don't waste the ammunition."

As quickly as Bogy could hand the guns they were discharged, and with deadly effect.

"Look! look!" cried Bogy, "they are running away."

It was, indeed, true. Terrified at the noise and smoke and the number of their fallen, the attackers were evidently seized with a panic, and those who had landed came rushing back to the canoes, but Jack noticed that they were not pursued.

"Why don't your people pursue?" he cried to Bogy.

"They are frightened of the guns, I think."

"Well, land us quick! Is there no opening in the reef?"

"Yes, yes, I will take you." Bogy then shouted some commands to the natives, who paddled them rapidly away from the scene of conflict, and in a few minutes they were ashore.

"Bring the guns and ammunition up," cried Jack, as he leapt from the canoe, "and lead us up to your people."

They had not far to go before they found themselves amidst a number of natives, who were standing irresolute, fearing to follow the retreating foes because of the guns. Bogy shouted something to them, and they with one accord dashed forward down to the shore, yelling, shouting, dancing, and brandishing their weapons.

"Tell them to pursue," cried Jack to Bogy

Now that they were assured that the guns were on their side, their courage returned, as also did that of the enemy as soon as they found the firing cease, and they again made for the island, and succeeded in effecting a landing before they could be encountered. With a wild yell they dashed from their canoes, and closed with the defenders with such ferocity and determination that they drove them back pell-mell.

Jack and Harry had in the meantime taken up a good commanding position. They had been loath to take a more prominent part in the battle than was necessary ; but seeing their friends hard pressed and likely to be defeated, they opened fire. For a moment it stayed the impetuous onslaught ; but brief as the time was, it gave the friendlies time to rally, and then came a stubborn hand-to-hand fight. So interested did the boys become in watching this struggle, that they forgot all about themselves until a cry from Bogy made them turn round. At the same instant half-a-dozen arrows whizzed past them, and Bogy fell to the ground wounded.

“ Here they come ! ” cried Harry, “ let drive, Jack ! ”

Bang went the guns, and down dropped two of the warriors ; but before the boys had time to pick up other guns or to re-load their own, four ferocious natives rushed upon them. Jack just had time to spring behind a tree, and thus avoided a spear thrust, but Harry had been borne to the ground, where he lay struggling for life in the embrace of a savage.

Bang came the report of a gun, and the savage rolled over. Jack leapt from behind

his tree, and securing the fallen man's spear, made a terrible onslaught on the remaining two, who stood half dazed at the noise of the gun. "In a moment Jack had placed them *hors de combat*. Harry had by this time regained his feet.

"Are you hurt, Bogy?" cried both boys, as they rushed to render him assistance.

"Not much, but never mind me; help to drive them off. If they win they will kill us all."

The boys saw that this was no time for nursing, but rather for hard fighting, so again taking up position, they blazed away as hard as they could. Their fire turned the scale of a stubborn fight, and the enemy once more fled to the canoes in disorder, this time hotly pursued.

"We must keep them on the move now," cried Jack, "or they'll be coming back again, so blaze away."

The boys kept up a hot fire, whilst the victorious defenders pursued the retreating foe with such energy, that only one canoe, with about half-a-dozen men in her, escaped to carry home the tale of how smoke and noise sprang from the very trees, killing their comrades when no man was near.

CHAPTER XVI

COLONISATION

AFTER a storm comes a calm, and after the fierce fight the boys had been engaged in, they rested on their laurels, enjoying to the full the peaceful, luxurious life with which the inhabitants of the favoured South Sea Islands are blessed when not at war.

Bogy's countrymen did not anticipate any further attack, at least not for a long time, from their enemies. The defeat had been too crushing, and the noise and smoke from the guns would have impressed the few that did escape so much, that if they ever reached their own island, their accounts of the battle would deter their comrades for a long time from trying any further efforts of conquest. The boys were hailed as deliverers, and fêted accordingly.

The night after the battle a great dance was inaugurated to celebrate the victory. The girls turned out in gaily-coloured cotton garments, which had been obtained from some European

trader; their hair was profusely decked with fresh-cut flowers, whilst some of them wore exquisite necklaces of mother-of-pearl. The boys thoroughly enjoyed the fête, though they did not take any part in the dancing, as the gyrations of the natives were too complicated even for Jack Rollock, lithe and active as he was.

Bogy seemed thoroughly happy at being once more amongst his own people, especially as no suspicion of complicity with the schooner's crew now attached to him.

The boys stayed for two months on the island. Though they were thoroughly comfortable, yet they yearned for the time when some vessel would call and take them away to more civilised parts; but as time went on, and no trader or man-of-war called, they, after a long consultation with Bogy and Peko, decided to go back to their old island.

They argued that if they left word with the natives where they had gone they would stand a double chance of falling in with a vessel; as if one called on their own island they would be taken off, and also if one called where they now were, the natives would direct the vessel where to find them.

On Bogy and Peko learning their decision, they made up their minds to accompany them, taking with them their wives and families.

"We may as well make a colony, Jack, whilst we are about it, and get a few more of these chaps to come," said Harry. "We'll call this Bogy Island, and our own Rollock Island."

"Where do you come in, Harry?"

"Oh, I'll have the atoll where the wreck is, but I shan't call it after my own name; I'll call it Skeleton Reef."

"It's just as well to give names, or we'll get rather mixed, now that we have so much territory."

It was finally decided that they should start for Rollock Island the following week.

Two natives and their families, besides Bogy and Peko, elected to accompany them. Not that they wanted particularly to leave their own island, but they were most anxious to visit the wreck, where they hoped to be able to find some metal. The natives of the South Seas will do almost anything in order to obtain knives, nails, or any kind of iron or steel, for unless they can obtain these from some trading

vessel, they have to make all their weapons and tools from stone or fish-bones, which take a long time to make, and are when made indifferent instruments at the best.

The boys decided to make the passage to Rollock Island in their own boat, which had been through so many vicissitudes with them. During the time they had dwelt with the natives of Bogy Island, they had managed to put her in good repair, and she was now quite seaworthy. The natives who were to accompany them did not take long in getting their goods and chattels ready. Though they had a certain amount of impediments in the shape of two babies belonging to Peko, the rest of the children belonging to the party ranged in age from seven to seventeen, and were all males; but even the youngest of them could use both spear and bow, so that in case of attack they would be able to render a good account of themselves, though there seemed little likelihood of such a thing happening.

The night before the party started, a grand dance similar to the one held after the battle was inaugurated. The boys were again the heroes, as the natives had not forgotten that

It was owing to their timely assistance that they were still in the land of the living.

At daylight on the following morning the colonists embarked, the whole of the inhabitants of the island coming down to see them off. The flotilla consisted of five canoes, and the *White Rose's* boat, Jack and Harry being the sole occupants of the latter, though she carried a lot of baggage and provisions. The party consisted of twenty-two persons in all, made up as follows: four men, four women, two girls, the two babies, eight youths of various ages, and our two heroes. Peko's canoe led the way, Bogy's keeping close to the gig, so that he might interpret in case the boys wished to communicate with the others.

There was a pleasant breeze blowing, and the little fleet was soon out of sight of the island. The boys were glad to be alone again, for, kind as the natives had been, they were getting rather tired of them.

"We might fall in with some vessel," said Jack, "before we reach our island; I hope we do, as I don't see what we gained by coming over here at all."

"Oh, I don't know; I think we've had a

rattling good time; besides, we did Bogy's people a good turn, and I'm glad of that."

"Yes, so am I, but I was in hope of falling in with some vessel. You don't know, Harry, how I long to get home again, or at least to be able to send a letter."

"Cheer up, old chap! we'll get into civilisation sooner or later. I call this prime. It's much better than keeping watch and watch aboard a ship. Why, here we are bosses of all this crowd. I mean to be a regular king when we get to the island. And think, with all the canoes we've got, we can carry on a regular trade with the other island. We can barter pieces of the wreck for copra, and then when a vessel calls we'll be able to sell it, and go home with any amount of money."

"When a vessel comes?" said Jack despondently. "That may not be for years."

"Don't get gloomy, Jack, just as we're starting for home; think of Rollock Island marked on every chart. My word! I call it a downright sin to get the hump when you're going to your own land. Think of me, with only a small atoll, and that called Skeleton, and nothing on it but an old wreck. You're a most ungrateful chap."

"Yes, Harry, you're right, I am ungrateful; besides, we've only got to deck this boat, and we've got everything to do it with,—a chest of carpenter's tools and plenty of timber, and heaps of canvas; why, we could get back to New Zealand any time we liked to start."

"That's better, Jack. I like to hear you talking like that. I don't mind tinkering this boat up so that she can make a voyage in safety, but I have no intention of abandoning the island until I have my pockets well lined."

"It would perhaps be rather foolish, now that we seem in a position to trade, but in any case it will be a satisfaction to have the boat ready for a long voyage if we should require to take one, so I propose that one of the first things we do is to get her decked, and then, when it comes on to blow, we'll put to sea to try what weather she will make."

"Yes, that's a very good idea; for, you see, if we have everything ready for going whenever we like, we'll probably stop until we have enough cargo to make it worth our while to charter a small craft to come and fetch it; but, hallo! here's the breeze going to drop."

The boat's sail gave a flap, and the gentle

breeze that had carried them along all the morning died away.

"I suppose we must get the oars out. It won't be much fun pulling on such a hot day as this; besides, we can't possibly keep up with the canoes unless they paddle very easy."

"Hi! Bogy, tell your chaps not to paddle fast, or we can't keep up with them," shouted Jack. "That's right, he understands. Now, then, let's douse the sail, and out with the oars."

The boys did not exert themselves much at pulling, owing to the intense heat, but the boat made fairly good way, as the sea was very calm, and the little fleet kept well together.

"If it keeps a dead calm like this, Jack, those niggers will have the best of it, as their canoes are so light, and our boat is not only heavy, but we have the best part of their gear in her. I think we had better impress some of the boys, and make them come and pull."

"No good, Harry; I don't suppose any of them, with the exception of Bogy and Peko, have ever handled an oar in their lives. They would be quite useless, but we'll teach them when we get to the island, as this boat will be far more useful than the canoes in carrying cargo."

They toiled on till nearly sunset, and were just discussing the advisability of getting Bogy and Peko to join them (this they could easily do, as there were plenty in their canoes to manage them, whereas the boat could not move unless it had two hands at the oars), when a slight breeze came along ruffling the smooth surface of the ocean.

"That's capital!" shouted Jack, as he once more hoisted the sail; "we'll keep it all night, I expect, as it comes up close on sunset."

The breeze, though very light at first, gradually increased, and by the time it was dark the boat was skimming through the water at about seven knots an hour.

"We had better keep watch and watch, Harry; you lie down here aft, so that if I want you I can rouse you up."

"Ay, ay, then I'll see if I can get a snooze now. Mind you don't lose touch with the canoes."

"No, not if I can help it; the boat can easily hold her own with them if this breeze continues. I'll rouse you when I think my four hours are up."

Harry made himself comfortable by lying on the bottom boards in the stern-sheets. H

had a fairly good bed, for the natives had presented them with several mats, and these formed an excellent couch ; he was also well in reach of Jack's foot, so he could be roused in an instant should it be necessary. He soon fell into a sound sleep, lulled by the ripple of the water as the boat clave her way along.

Steering was very easy, as the boat required but little helm, and Jack enjoyed the peaceful scene. The stars were very bright, and the breeze just sufficient to make sailing absolutely comfortable.

"How I long to be aboard a ship again!" he mused ; "it seems ages since we left the *White Rose*—but it's a good idea of Harry's to collect enough copra to freight a small vessel. It would be jolly to own a good little schooner, but then one would have to get a skipper and crew. No, it will be better to sell the stuff. When we get the boat decked, Harry and I can go for a long cruise in her till we fall in with a vessel, and then we can sell whatever amount we have, and take a passage in her as well." For long hours he sat steering and building airy castles, his chum the while having a thorough good snooze. It was breaking day when he roused him with a kick.

"Now then, up you get, old chap, or the sun will singe your eyelashes," he shouted.

"My stars!" exclaimed Harry as he sat up, "you are a good chap to do my watch. Why, it's daylight!"

"Yes, very nearly; there, he's rising," said Jack, pointing to a glow in the east. "Now, haven't I kept a good course? Look! one, two, three. Hallo! where are the others?"

"I see them," shouted Harry, "right away astern, nearly out of sight. Why, we must have passed them; this old boat can sail after all."

"Oh, yes, she's a regular clipper, and when we've got her decked, we shall be able to go anywhere in her."

The two leading canoes now lowered their sails, and began to paddle gently to give the others a chance to come up, so that in about half-an-hour the little fleet was once more close together, when they again made sail and continued their voyage.

The breeze held good, and on the evening of the third day after sailing, they were once more safely ashore on Rollock Island, the boat and canoes snugly moored in the lagoon, whilst the surf breaking on the barrier reef lulled them into a quiet and much-needed slumber.

CHAPTER XVII

A TERRIBLE NIGHT

Now that the island was inhabited, it became necessary to have a certain number of rules and regulations. So, on the day after landing, Jack and Harry called Bogy and Peko to a consultation as to the future management of things.

Bogy did not anticipate any trouble from the natives who had accompanied them. He knew them all to be quiet, peaceful, good-natured people, and he thought the best plan would be to let them live where they liked, and do what they liked. They were sociable, so would probably live all close together, and form a village much the same, only on a smaller scale, as in their own island.

"That's all right," said Jack; "your people must manage their own affairs. Where do you think you will form the village?"

"No better place than where we are now, Master Jack. There is plenty to eat anywhere

on the island, so it does not much matter, but there is a good opening in the reef here which makes this place handy."

"Very well, Bogy, you have the village where you like; Harry and I will have a hut not far off. Now, next week I propose we go across to the wreck and bring away as much as we can from her. There are some good sails, and any amount of other things which will be useful, and when we've got everything that we can off her, we'll break her up, for we can then barter all her iron-work with your people for copra."

"But there is no ship to buy the copra; what do you mean to do with it?" asked Bogy.

"Oh! a vessel will come some day; if not, we'll take the boat and cruise about until we find one. Now away you go, Bogy, and settle your people, whilst Harry and I take a look round to see where we're going to pitch our camp."

"Now I propose," said Harry, when Bogy and Peko had gone, "that we don't go very far away from the others. It's not over lively as it is."

"I don't want to go far away, but I think it will be better not to live altogether in the

village. We'll see plenty of them without exactly herding with them."

"All right, about a hundred yards away will be plenty."

"Oh yes, fifty will be sufficient. Now, here's a nice place—just the very thing; we can rig up a tent with some of the sails from the wreck, and be as happy as sand-boys."

"Yes, this is a jolly nook, and we can see if any vessel comes in sight."

In a few days' time the natives had begun to build the village, which consisted of huts, or rather only of poles stuck into the ground, with a thick roof made of palm leaves.

"Not much work for the jerry builder," remarked Harry, as he surveyed the first one when finished. "Why, it looks for all the world like a huge beehive. We'll have a tent, Jack, and then we can shift about as much as we like."

"Yes, rather! It would be a pity not to use some of the canvas. I think we had better take some of the carpenter's tools with us when we go to the wreck; we may have to saw away parts of her—every bit will come in useful."

"Of course it will, if it's only to burn. We'll

light a fire with the locker, where the skeleton was sitting, as soon as ever we get there. It will be much more comfortable on her after that's gone, in case we should ever have to stop the night. I think if we made a raft, we might clear most of the useful things away in about two journeys."

"It would be far too cumbersome; besides, it would take us about a week to tow her there, and if we lost her, away goes everything. No, we had better bring a little at a time; we've got plenty of hands, plenty of canoes, and plenty of time."

"All right; perhaps it would be best; when shall we go?"

"To-morrow would be a good day, I should think. We'll only take Bogy and one of the natives and two of the boys. They can go in a canoe, and Bogy can come with us in the boat."

The necessary preparations for the expedition were soon made. The boat was amply provisioned in case they should be compelled to stay any length of time away. Peko was left in charge of the island, with orders to send word to the atoll in the event of a vessel calling or being sighted.

On the following morning they made an early start, and as there was a strong breeze they arrived at the atoll about mid-day. It was evident that the wreck had not been discovered during their long absence, as everything was exactly as they had left it. After getting the boats into the lagoon, they got out the carpenter's tools which they had brought with them, and made their way aboard, leaving one of the native boys to act as cook.

Jack was most anxious to explore the lazarette, as he thought it probable that they would find many useful articles stowed away there, and for this purpose they had brought with them several torches which had been made by the women on Rollock Island; but these were not wanted, for one of the first things they came across was a large drum of oil, which enabled them to trim the anchor lamp, which they found hanging in the unfortunate steward's pantry.

"Now then, Harry, are you coming down with me?" said Jack, as he prepared to descend into the darkness of the lazarette. "I don't expect we'll find any more skeletons, unless they are those of rats."

"Of course I'll come, Jack. I'll go first, if you like."

"No, no; but just get me that ball of spun yarn out of the mate's berth; you'll find it in the lower bunk."

In a few seconds Harry returned with the spun yarn, and Jack, making the end of it fast to the lamp, lowered it down the hatch.

"Ah! that's all right," he exclaimed, as he peered down into the gloomy-looking place. "There's a biscuit tank or something of the sort just below, so here goes. Hand me the lamp as soon as I am landed;" so saying, he let himself down the hatch and disappeared.

There was a hollow sound as he alighted on the iron tank, and immediately after he shouted for them to lower the lamp down.

"Stand clear!" shouted Harry, when he had complied with Jack's request. "I'm just coming."

"All clear! It's nothing of a drop."

Bogy remained at the top of the hatch with a rope's end to haul up anything the boys should bend on.

The lazarette was small, and pretty well lumbered up. It contained a good quantity of ship stores. The tank was half full of

biscuits. There were also about half-a-dozen hams and some dried fish, a barrel and a half of flour, some rice, a cask of molasses, and two kegs of rum, besides several other eatable things.

"Well, it's evident that poor chap we found did not die of starvation; but he must have died of thirst, poor fellow—you see there's not a drop of water anywhere."

"No, I expect that was kept down the fore peak, and when the ship broke up forrard it went with the rest of her."

"Well, we don't want any of these provisions at present; they've mostly gone bad too, by the look of them. Though the hams will be all right, I expect."

"Ham is good," said Harry; "we'll pass one up and have it for supper."

"On deck there!"

"Ay, ay," answered Bogy.

"Haul this up," shouted Harry, as he bent the biggest ham on to the end of the rope.

The boys now explored further, and found plenty of useful things, such as boxes of nails, screws, some pickaxes and spades, and also several cooking utensils, all brand new, though

a bit rusty. They also found two more boxes of ammunition.

"My word! Jack, they seem to have been well supplied with fighting materials. I wonder what her trade was? Black-birding, I expect."

"Not necessarily. These traders have to be well armed, for the natives are pretty savage on some of the islands; but never mind in what trade she was, let's thank our stars we found some of the stuff in good order. It may come in useful some day."

The boys rummaged about, sending things on deck for some hours, when Bogy told them it was getting dark, so they climbed once more into the cabin, and inspected the things they had passed up.

"Well, we'll have the ham for supper," said Harry, as he caught hold of it. "Bring the frying-pan, Bogy, and Jack can have a look round in the pantry, and see if he can't find a few plates and knives and forks; there are sure to be some about."

Jack had little difficulty in finding plates and dishes, but nowhere could he lay his hands on knives and forks. He was joined by the natives in his search, but they were equally

unsuccessful, so they made their way off the wreck, and joined their chums round the fire.

Harry was acting as cook, and had cut nearly the whole of the ham in slices, which were sizzling in the frying-pan.

"This is something like, eh, Jack!" he said. "I wonder if these natives like ham? Ask them, Bogy."

"They don't know what it is, but they like pigs when they are fresh killed."

"Oh, they'll like this better then. It's quite good, Jack, though I had to cut a good deal away off the outside, as it was a bit mouldy. Doesn't it smell nice?"

The natives certainly appreciated the ham, for they ate it ravenously with slices of baked bread-fruit.

"That's the first square meal I've had for months," said Harry, as he finished. "Now, if we only had a smoke, Jack, we could be quite happy. I expect there is tobacco aboard somewhere; I wonder if the natives came across any when they were routing about the berths. Ask them, Bogy."

Bogy, after an elaborate explanation as to what was wanted, found that they had come

across a box of black stuff, which from their description was evidently tobacco. It was in the captain's state-room.

"I'll go and get it," said Harry; "will you come, Jack? I don't much like going down in that cabin alone."

"Rather! I should think I would; I would go anywhere for a smoke. I've stuck to my pipe all this time. You haven't one, have you?"

"No, but I'll go shares with you. I lost mine when we got capsized out of the boat, but there are sure to be some aboard, if we can only put our hands on them."

They had left the anchor lamp in the pantry, so they lit one of the torches and went on to the wreck. Their hearts rather failed them as they made their way down into the deserted cabin, the torch throwing a lurid light which flickered and danced on the doors of the empty berths; but a sailor will go anywhere and do anything for a smoke, and they quickly made their way into the state-room. They found the box stowed away under the bunk, so taking a plug out, they hastened on deck and soon rejoined their companions, who had already stretched themselves down on the mats for their night's rest.

"Turn and turn about, Harry—twelve draws each first, then you can smoke a whole pipe out, and go to sleep, leaving it with me."

"You'll have the best of it, Jack, for you can sit up half the night if you like and puff away. No, we'll have pipe and pipe about."

"All right, just as you like ; only hurry up—the smell of the weed makes me ravenous to get a pull."

The next day the boys busied themselves in selecting from among the numerous things which had been brought on deck those most likely to prove useful on Rollock Island in the immediate future.

There were so many things, all of which appeared to be essential to their comfort, that selecting was no easy matter. So they finally decided, with the exception of a few articles, to take things pretty much as they came. Of course, the ammunition and the case of tobacco were considered absolutely necessary, and were stowed in the boat with great care. Jack was fortunate enough to find several pipes whilst overhauling the captain's sea-chest, so they no longer had to wait until one had done before the other could get a smoke.

So busily were they engaged in the cabin of the vessel, that they did not notice that the weather had undergone a remarkable change since the early morning. The breeze had completely died away, and the sea was now as calm as a mill-pond. It was about mid-day, as they left the wreck to get their dinner, that they first noticed the change. The sun was shining with intense power, but all around the sky was the colour of slate, which made the smooth sea look gloomy and threatening.

"I say; Bogy, what are we going to get?" said Jack. "Is it going to blow?"

"It looks like it, Master Jack; I don't think we had better start to go back to-day."

"No, I shouldn't think so," exclaimed Harry; "there's something brewing. My word! it is close. Phew! I can scarcely breathe. It looks to me as if we're in for a hurricane. This is not much of a place to be on, Jack, if it comes on to blow hard, but it wouldn't be wise to try and fetch the island with that looking sky above us, would it? Even if we weathered a gale the stores might get wet."

"No, I think we're safer where we are, Harry; there's more than a gale of wind up

there. I don't like the look of it a bit. We had better get the things we put in the boat back on the wreck; they'll be quite dry down in the cabin, however hard it blows."

"I don't know that; the vessel certainly seems pretty firmly wedged in where she is. It must have been a big sea that put her here."

"Yes, but she's been here a long time, and is sure to have weathered a few gales. This may only be thunder and rain that's coming—they get more of that in these parts than they do of wind, I believe; anyhow, we'll get the ammunition and other stuff aboard, and make things as snug as we can."

A strange silence now pervaded everything, and in spite of their endeavours to keep cheery, a settled gloom stole over them. The atmosphere seemed charged with electricity, and their nerves soon became so highly strung that the slightest movement on the part of any one of them made the rest jump.

Jack had endeavoured to find work for them all, but there was really nothing to be done, so he at last gave it up, and joined them in looking at the sun, which was beginning to set.

The natives had drawn close together, and were huddled against the skylight. Harry and Jack stood by the companion. For a long time no one spoke. They all looked with gloomy foreboding on the fast sinking sun.

"What do you think of it, Bogy?" said Jack suddenly.

Everybody gave an involuntary jump at the sound of his voice. Not that there was anything strange about it, but it seemed as if the silence was so great that it would carry over the gloomy expanse of dark ocean into the lurid copper-coloured and blood-streaked clouds, which the setting sun made glow, disclosing what looked like columns of smouldering sulphur only waiting for a puff of wind to burst into devouring flame.

"I don't know, Master Jack," answered Bogy almost in a whisper; "I have never seen anything like this before. It looks bad."

"Yes," said Jack with assumed gaiety, "we ought to be thankful we're not at sea, though we're certainly pretty near it."

The sun was now the colour of a glowing brazen ball. It was near the horizon, and looked in such a state of angry heat that

Harry remarked to Jack, "it would probably burst the moment it touched the water." Slowly it sank, until its lower limb was hidden by the sea. Suddenly a flash of lightning seemed to rend the heavens. The natives fell on their faces, and the boys covered their eyes with their hands, and waited to hear what every one expected—a rending, crashing peal of thunder. But all remained quiet, and when Jack uncovered his eyes, the sun had gone.

"Harry, that was simply awful. I wish whatever is coming would come. But it does not look so bad now ; it may clear off."

"Not it ; no such luck. I'll tell you what I think is going to happen. That's an earthquake. It does seem rough if this little bit of a reef we're on should collapse, doesn't it ?"

"You're right, Harry ; that's just what is coming off, I bet. But it needn't be this place where it's going to happen. Why, there's hardly any earth to quake here ! I expect there's a volcano on some of the islands not far off. Oh, I say, it is stifling. I'm going down to light the cabin lamp ; we may as well be comfortable. You might come with me."

"I will, like a shot, but where are you going

to get the light from? The fire looks as if it's gone out, and you won't get these natives to twirl sticks until this storm, or whatever it is, is over."

"Where are the torches, Bogy?"

"On the reef, Master Jack, by the fire."

"Well, we must have a light, Harry, so I'll go down and see if I can't blow the fire into life again; I dare say some of the embers will flare up if I blow them. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, go ahead!"

The boys let themselves down the rope on to the reef. Though Jack must have climbed down hundreds of ropes since the memorable night when he ran away from school, yet that escapade came back vividly to him, as he swung himself off the wreck and alighted on this lonely belt of coral placed miles away from any continent as a speck in the vast Pacific. He waited for Harry to join him. He felt the rope shake as his chum swung himself off. At that instant the whole heavens were illuminated by a blue light. The wreck stood out in bold relief against the black of the surrounding waters, and the solitary figure of

Harry hanging to the rope looked weird and strange. But the lightning was of short duration, and the next instant a pitchy darkness enveloped everything.

"Where are you?" he shouted.

"Here, alongside of you," answered Harry. "That wasn't as bad a flash as the first; it's only like wildfire compared with the one that went off at sundown. I say, it *is* dark; do you think you can find the remains of the fire—hadn't we better climb aboard again?"

"No, I can find the way; come on!"

The boys stumbled along through the darkness.

"It ought to be about here somewhere. Here you are," cried Jack, as he kicked into the middle of some smouldering embers. "Now then, feel about until you find the torches, whilst I try to blow the fire into a blaze."

After a few minutes' search Harry found the bundle.

"I have them," he shouted; "blow away, and we'll soon get a light."

Jack found it impossible to fan the flame into a blaze with the small amount of breath at his disposal, but by applying a torch, and with

the aid of Harry, they after a time got it to ignite.

"Now, we're all right. I say, doesn't it look black all round! Let's hurry up and get aboard again."

"I haven't the slightest idea where the wreck is now. We faced all round the compass whilst blowing the fire up. We must hail Bogy."

"Bogy ahoy!" they shouted together.

"Here, this way!" answered Bogy, comprehending their difficulty.

"That's all right, now we've got our bearings. I was thinking that we might possibly have to wait until the next flash of lightning came, and goodness knows what it will bring with it."

In a few minutes' time the boys were again safely on the wreck. They felt it a great relief to be once more alongside other human beings, though they weren't white men.

"Now, then, come on, and we'll light the cabin lamp. Haul the tarpaulin over the skylight, and then we'll have a snug place to retire to if the deck becomes untenable."

The atmosphere of the cabin was ten times

worse than it was on deck; and though they were only below a sufficient time to light the lamp, yet the perspiration was rolling off them in streams when they again gained the poop.

"We couldn't live down there five minutes," said Harry; "it's bad enough up here. My word! I can scent brimstone—can't you?"

"There is a curious smell. We'll get something directly to clear the air or finish us off. Phew! Isn't it horrible?"

"Oh, Jack! isn't it frightfully dark?" said Harry. "I think it was better in the cabin, for I can hardly draw a breath even up here, and the light is a comfort, after all."

"Something must come soon, Harry, to clear the air, or we'll all be asphyxiated. Those natives seem very quiet; I hope they're all well, Bogy?"

"Yes."

"That's right; we thought you were all suffocated. There's a light in the cabin, if you would sooner go below."

"No, we will stop on deck, Master Jack. Oh, look!"

At that instant a flash of lightning rent the inky darkness away to the south-west, and

immediately after the sky in that quarter was illuminated by a bright glare.

"It's coming, Jack ; we'll be able to breathe soon," said Harry, almost in a whisper.

As he spoke the whole heavens suddenly seemed to open, and both boys and natives fell to the deck and covered their faces, expecting the next instant the summons into eternity.

There was a crash of thunder, followed by a mighty roll that seemed to shake the wreck, firmly fixed as she was in the reef.

"Let us stand by like sailors," shouted Jack, springing up, "not hide our heads like camels, and may God Almighty have mercy on us. Ah ! that's better ; there's a slight breeze."

It was but the slightest catpaw, but it freshened the half-suffocated men up, and they stood and looked with wonder and amazement at the scene around them. From all quarters lightning was flashing and darting, and so incessant was it, that it would have been almost possible to have read a book. It was still a dead calm, and the sea seemed black and motionless. Not a sound was to be heard except the roll of distant thunder away to the south-west.

"That's where the storm is coming from," remarked Jack.

"Coming from? why, it's here already. I was nearly deafened by that last clap of thunder. We've got all we're going to get, I should hope."

"I'm not so sure of that."

For a few moments the lightning ceased to play, and they were once again wrapped in an awful gloom.

Harry clutched hold of Jack. No one spoke, but all gazed to the south-west; for out of the blackness in that quarter there rose a reddish yellow light. It looked weird and horrible; then, whilst they gazed, a distant rumbling noise could be heard, and again they thought they felt the wreck shake, but the water around remained as smooth as before.

Once more the lightning seemed let loose. It had as it were ceased for a few moments, only to come with greater intensity, and every minute the atmosphere became more and more oppressive.

"O Jack, if we only had a breeze, even for a few minutes!" gasped Harry piteously.

The rolling noise in the south-west gradually increased, until at last they hardly noticed the

peals of thunder which were constantly crashing overhead. Suddenly the sea began to recede from the reef. Every moment the rushing noise grew stronger, and shortly, to their horror, they saw a huge mountainous wave approach them.

"Hold on, for Heaven's sake!" yelled Jack.

They were all too appalled, or rather fascinated, watching the approach of this huge wave of black seething water, to make any attempt to get below.

"This is death coming," shouted Jack into Harry's ear, for the noise was now so tremendous that communications had to be shouted at the top of the voice. Harry squeezed Jack's hand, and then took a fierce grip of the corner of the tarpaulin cover which was over the skylight.

As the mountainous wave came near, the water rushed to meet it.

It was an awful moment. The heavens were one blaze of lurid light; the wreck poised on her bed of coral far out of the water, the terrified natives clinging together on the forepart of the skylight, Jack alone standing up watching what appeared to him to be certain death, formed a picture never to be forgotten.

The crashing of the thunder was unheeded ; all were fascinated by the wave.

"Hold tight for your lives!" yelled Jack, as he sprang towards the companion.

With a terrific crash the wave swept over the reef. The old wreck seemed suddenly possessed of life. They felt her rise with a bound, then a deluge of water swept over her, there was a tremendous bump, a noise of rending timbers, the sea bubbled and seethed around her for a few minutes. Then the roar of the wave gradually grew less and less distinct, a light breeze stole across the heaving and agitated bosom of the ocean, the thunder and lightning grew fainter and fainter, and the stars one by one shone forth in peaceful tropical splendour.

Dripping and saturated, the boys and natives knelt down and thanked each their God that they still lived.

The wreck no longer stood poised on the coral reef ; but though broken more than ever, still she held together, and formed an island and place of safety in the middle of the atoll's shallow lagoon.

CHAPTER XVIII

A VESSEL SIGHTED

THE sun rose bright and clear, and there was nothing to mark the horrors of the previous night save that the wreck had shifted her position, and canoes and boat had disappeared.

"Well, here we are, and here we're likely to remain," said Jack, after taking a long and careful look round, in the hope of seeing either boat or canoe.

"Do you think Peko will have the sense to come and look after us, Bogy?" he inquired.

"If he is alive, Master Jack; but the island might have been blown up."

"No fear of that; whatever happened was a good deal more to the south'ard. We got it a great deal worse than they did, I'll lay; besides, I think it's much more probable that some new island appeared, than that ours disappeared."

"I should think it must have been a whole continent, not an island. But I say, we were jolly lucky to bring that tobacco and ammunition aboard, instead of leaving it on the reef;

we should have lost every bit if we had," chimed in Harry.

"That comes of taking my advice. Now you, Bogy, take some of your chums and swim about the lagoon, and see if you can find any trace of the boat or canoes. They might have sunk; if so, we shall be able to get them up again. Harry, you and I will examine the wreck, and see what damage has been done."

"Ay, ay! that's the way to tell us off. The amphibious portion of the crew will take to the water, whilst we'll see if we can't find some breakfast. I hope the hams haven't been washed overboard."

"They'll be all right; there wasn't much water got below. Now, Bogy, away you go with your men, and we'll have breakfast ready in about an hour. Send the two lads to walk round the reef, whilst you and your chum swim about. If you come across any fish, bring them back. We'll have to light a fire in a frying-pan, or something of that sort, or else we'll burn the deck."

"That doesn't matter much now, Jack, for you see we've got no boat left to use the wood for."

"No, that's true enough, only we don't want

to set fire to the old hulk at present ; there are plenty of useful things in her yet."

Bogy and his companions were soon over the side swimming and diving like porpoises.

"If the boat has sunk anywhere in the lagoon, they'll soon find her," said Jack. "So now come along and we'll explore down below."

Here all was much the same as it had been the night before. The cabin lamp was still burning, though nearly out. It was on descending to the lazarette that they found the most damage. It was nearly full of water.

"Well, of course, this is what we might have known. I'm jolly thankful that the cabin is dry ; if the lagoon had been deeper we should have been flooded out," said Jack.

"I'll tell you what we must do. We must get as many things out of here as possible, then make a raft, take them on to the reef, and camp there until Peko comes and takes us off. I hope he won't be long either, for we've got nothing to drink except the rum."

"Oh ! we mustn't touch that, or it will make us mad with thirst. We must set to work, if those chaps don't find the boat, to knock up some kind of a craft, and leave here to-day if possible. We have plenty of gear and tools ;

we ought to be able to make a decent kind of raft in a few hours, and be back to the island by to-morrow morning."

The swimmers soon returned, having failed to find anything of either the boat or the canoes. A hasty breakfast was made of some of the ham and a few mouldy weevilly biscuits, which they got out of the tank, and immediately after they set to work to construct the raft. This was a comparatively easy task, for they had several casks, plenty of timber, and rope; they utilised the doors of the berths and the sides of the bunks, as these were quite strong enough to carry them; but though they worked hard it was close on sunset before they had their craft ready. The sea was beautifully calm, and there was every appearance of a long spell of fine weather; but as thirst was beginning to make itself felt, they decided to start at once, instead of spending another night on the reef and making their voyage in daylight.

"We have everything ready; we may as well start. We can't make the island before mid-day to-morrow, even if the sea remains like this, and if we wait for daylight we'll be half famished and probably run on the barrier reef, as it will be night when we get there," said Jack.

Bogy had constructed two splendid paddles, and it only remained for all hands to get aboard to see how the strange craft carried them. Jack and Harry took up their position and shoved her clear of the reef, the natives swimming after her until she was in deep water. They then climbed aboard one at a time, the raft bearing their weight well.

"Why, we've got plenty of freeboard now," said Harry. "I wish we had brought some cargo with us."

"Bother the cargo! Let's get to the island; we can easily come back in the other canoes to fetch anything that we may want."

The raft moved slowly, but still she did move, and, as the distance was not very great, they stood a good chance of getting to the island without having to spend another night at sea, providing that the weather kept fine.

They took spells at the paddles of about an hour's duration. No one slept, as they were all too anxious and thirsty, and the long night gradually passed away in strange contrast to that of the previous one; in place of the sullen roar of thunder, the vivid lightning, and the fetid atmosphere, were peacefully shining stars, just a flutter of cool wind, and a smooth sea,

which lapped against the raft with a musical ripple.

At daylight no land was in sight, and as the sun rose and grew in power, their thirst became almost unbearable. Mid-day passed, yet no island, and they began to fear that it might have been swallowed up during the storm, but Jack, though he did not feel at all easy inwardly, pooh-poohed this idea. "Why, how do you expect these old tubs and planks to make any way? I shall think we're lucky if we sight land by to-morrow morning. I don't suppose we're going more than a knot an hour, even if we're going so much."

But the want of water was driving the crew distracted, and they paid but little attention to what Jack said, though Bogy interpreted it faithfully, and himself remained calm, as did Harry, and they were all filled with the most gloomy forebodings.

It was about three in the afternoon, as near as it was possible to judge by the sun, when Jack discerned a speck on the horizon. He was about to call out, "Land oh!" but checked himself lest he should be mistaken and raise false hopes; but a few minutes after one of the native boys suddenly yelled out some-

thing in his own tongue, and began to caper about the raft, so as to endanger its stability.

"What's he shouting about, Bogy?" inquired Harry.

"He sees land, Master Harry. Yes, I see it too. It is the island."

"Come on, lads," shouted Jack, "double bank the paddles, and give the old craft way; we must get in before dark."

Though they worked hard the raft went but slowly, but the speck gradually became more and more distinct, until they were able to make out the tall graceful palm trees, and there could no longer be any doubt that it was the island; shortly after, to their intense joy, they saw a canoe coming to meet them. She soon got alongside, though it seemed, to the half-famished occupants of the raft, hours. There were only two men in her; they had been out fishing, and had spied the raft making for the island, little thinking it was their friends returning. Bogy gave them a short outline of the disasters which had overtaken the expedition. Unfortunately the crew had no fresh water aboard, so after a short palaver, the crew of the raft got into the canoe, leaving the two fishermen to bring her in; as, work as they

would, they could not get the raft to move at anything but a snail's pace. Once in the canoe, Bogy and his companions made her literally fly through the water, and in less than half-an-hour the little expedition had safely landed on Rollock Island, where they were able to quench their thirst, and indulge in a long sleep, things they had been strangers to for nearly three days.

Next morning when they woke they found the raft at anchor in the lagoon, the two natives having managed to get her in without any mishap, though it had been a long and tedious job.

The storm which our heroes had experienced on Skeleton Reef had not visited Rollock Island. Though they had seen lightning and heard distant thunder, it had not been very severe. They had noticed that the sea had become greatly agitated during the night, but no great wave had swept their shores.

"If we hadn't come back when we did, were you coming to look for us, Peko?" inquired Jack.

Peko informed him that he would probably not have come for some days, as he had no idea that they had experienced anything like bad weather, but thought they were only kept

busy on the reef, and were dismantling the wreck.

“Well, it’s a blessing that we made the raft, for we should certainly have died had we waited for you. To be without any water for several days would have about finished us all off, after having gone through a night with an atmosphere of sulphur and brimstone for a start; and then it would have been Skeleton Reef with a vengeance.”

For several days no one left Rollock Island, but all were anxious to get what they could off the wreck, so it was at last decided to make another journey to the reef, taking two canoes, and bringing back what things they could. This journey was accomplished without any mishap. So it was arranged to make periodical trips, until they had got all they could off her. Between the trips all hands worked hard at perfecting the raft, and trying to make her as much like a boat as possible. Jack’s great ambition was to get her into sailing condition, as he thought about two journeys would then clear away everything worth having, and with her timbers he felt sure they could easily make a boat which would enable them to reach some civilised and frequented port.

The natives seemed perfectly happy and contented on Rollock Island. They were honest, good-hearted people, and the boys might have lived quite happily amongst them, save that each was possessed with a burning desire to again get back to the land of his birth.

Months went by, but no vessel had come near the island. They kept up a pretty frequent intercourse with Boggy Island, and did a considerable trade, exchanging things which they had brought from the wreck for copra, of which they now had a considerable quantity—quite sufficient to load a small schooner or brigantine.

Jack and Harry, with the assistance of Peko and Boggy and some of the native boys, worked hard at building a boat, and they had nearly completed her hull when an event happened that quite upset their plans. They had for a week been working hard on her from early morn until dark, and had impressed the whole of the inhabitants into their service. They had been willing helpers, as Jack had promised to fetch them all kinds of things back from New Zealand. So the sooner she was finished the sooner he would be able to return to fetch

the copra, and bring them European goods in exchange.

She was rather an ungainly-looking craft, but very strongly built, and the boys felt no fear but that they would be able to accomplish their journey in safety. Both Boggy and Peko had promised to accompany them on the voyage, so that the little craft would be properly manned.

"Well, she may be ugly," said Jack, as he surveyed her just as they were about to knock off for the night, "but I'll back she'll be a good sea boat; see what a beam she's got, and she'll be flying light. We'll only just take sufficient provisions to last us during the voyage, and there'll always be the chance of falling in with a vessel."

As he was speaking, one of the native boys who had been out on the reef fishing returned in a great state of excitement, and running to Boggy, began telling him something, and speaking so quickly that the boys, though they had learned the language fairly well, were unable to make head or tail of what he was saying.

"What's all the row about, Boggy?" inquired Jack, unable to restrain his curiosity. "One would think the fleet had hove in sight."

"He says he has seen a sail, Master Jack."

"A sail! Where?" exclaimed both boys in a breath.

Bogy spoke to the boy, who indicated by pointing the direction.

"It will be too dark for us to see her to-night, Master Jack, but as there is very little wind, we can send a canoe off to look for her."

"That's the very thing! I'll go in her, and if she's English, why, Harry, we may be home-ward-bound by this time to-morrow. Hurrah!"

"I will get a canoe, Master Jack, and we'll soon be able to find her;" and Bogy ran down to the lagoon calling for Peko to come and join him.

"Isn't this splendid, Harry? We shan't want to use the boat after all. How jolly it will be to see white men again, though these natives are good fellows."

"I'll tell you what it is, Jack: we must get them to light a big fire on the island in case it has not been sighted from the vessel; it lies very low, and they might easily not have seen it. But if they see a fire, then they are sure to be attracted to it."

Bogy and Peko soon had a canoe ready, and the boys, after having given orders for the fire

to be lighted, jumped in, accompanied by the native boy who had seen the sail, and were soon paddling fast in the direction indicated by the lad.

They had not got far out when they saw the blaze of the fire which the natives had immediately lighted after receiving the order.

"That will fetch them, I know," said Harry ; "look how it blazes up—it will be seen for miles out to sea."

"Yes, but she may take no notice of it unless she is only dodging about looking for a cargo. Pull away, Bogy, let's get to her."

"She won't get away, Master Jack ; there is not enough breeze to move her a knot an hour."

"The moon will be up soon, and then we shall stand a better chance of finding her. My word ! that's a grand fire they've lighted ashore ; it looks just as if it were on the barrier reef."

"I expect that's where they've lit it, Master Jack."

"Well, wherever it is, the crew of the vessel must be blind if they don't see it. I hope they're not using any of the timber we had got ready for the boat."

The night was dark save for the stars, which were shining brightly in the cloudless sky, but

by degrees a faint glow began to appear to the eastward, and presently the moon rose, sending a clear flood of silvery light across the calm bosom of the ocean.

"Now, keep your eyes open," shouted Jack. "I see her. Hurrah! Avast pulling, Bogy; Peko, look."

"Yes, I see her," said both of the natives at once.

"She's a schooner," cried Harry; "we must be careful, lest we fall in with some gentry like Tom Hackett again."

"Pull away! let's get closer. We can't tell much about her in this light, and at this distance."

A quarter of an hour's hard paddling brought them quite close to the vessel.

"Avast pulling," cried Jack; "now let's take a good decko at her."

"She does look uncommonly like the *Pearl*, and no one seems to be awake aboard, or else they would have seen us and hailed," said Harry, after scrutinising her carefully.

"I do believe you're right, Harry. She is just like the *Pearl*, but I should think they had had such a good lesson in sleeping in their watch on deck that they would not repeat it."

"No, perhaps not, when they have prisoners ; but I don't suppose she's got any on her now. What do you think of her, Bogy ?"

"I think she does look like the *Pearl*."

Peko thought so too, and strongly urged that they should not board her.

"Well, we can't let a chance like this slip: Though she looks like Tom Hackett's craft, yet it needn't be her ; and even supposing she was, he may not be aboard ; I should think he had been strung up long ago. Shall we hail her ? That couldn't do any harm, for they must have seen our fire. You hail her, Bogy, in your own language ; they would never catch us even if they lowered a boat and gave chase."

"No, they might not catch us ; but supposing they had not seen the fire, it would be better not to call their attention to it."

"That's all very fine, Bogy ; but you don't want to get home. You are at home—you know it's different with us ; besides, they are bound to have seen the fire, even if they haven't the island. Now just give them a hail, and be ready to paddle away if necessary."

Bogy, after a little hesitation, hailed in his

native tongue, and, to everybody's surprise, he was answered back in his own language.

"It is the schooner, Master Jack. It is the Parson that answered; I know his voice—I can never forget it. What shall we do?"

"Ask him if he's coming to trade."

Several questions and answers took place between the two.

"He wants us to go aboard. What shall I tell him?"

"Oh, say to-morrow; and then we'll pull back to the island, and get things ready for defence."

After a little more palaver, they turned the canoe's head towards the island, and made their way back as quickly as possible.

"We'll give Tom Hackett such a reception, if he attempts to come ashore, as will surprise him," said Jack; "but are you sure it was him, Bogy?"

"It was, Master Jack; I could tell his voice amongst a thousand. I have heard him preach in my tongue, and could never forget the way he speaks. It was the man they call the Parson."

CHAPTER XIX

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

As soon as the canoe was safely in the lagoon, her crew jumped ashore, and the whole of the inhabitants of the island were mustered.

"Now, then, Bogy, you tell the yarn as to what vessel it is, and all about her crew; and when they've heard, if they don't lend a hand to put up a stockade which will puzzle Master Tom Hackett and his bloodthirsty pirates to take, my name is not Jack Rollock."

"I'll tell them, Master Jack, never fear," answered Bogy, who immediately began to harangue the assembled natives.

"That's right," said Jack, as the speaker made a pause for breath; "cut it short. Less palaver and more work; that's the order of the day, or rather the night, for we can't tell when these kidnapping cut-throats will pay us a visit."

The carpenter's tools were distributed amongst the most intelligent of the natives. Trees were felled, and by dint of very hard

work, a fairly strong and well-constructed fort was erected by break of day. All the arms were carried within it, and ready loaded for immediate use. The fort was not visible from the shore, as they had selected a site amongst the trees, though they had been careful to leave space, so that the guns would command the opening in the reef, which would be the most likely place for a boat's crew to effect a landing.

"Now, I think we'll have them if they try any of their tricks on," said Harry, as he surveyed the night's work. "Tom Hackett, your hours are numbered if you come ashore, for the natives will have you as sure as a die, and I don't believe all the missionaries in the world would save your skin if they once get hold of you. Do you, Jack?"

"Well, I don't know about that; but I think if Hackett knew how well we are prepared to receive him, he and his schooner would probably sheer off without waiting to try results, and seek pastures new, where there's no gunpowder. But has any one gone to look for the schooner?"

"Yes, Master Jack; Peko has gone, and here he comes."

"Is she in sight?" asked both boys at once.

"Yes," answered Peko; and then he began a long yarn, most of it in his native tongue, with a few words of English which he had picked up thrown in.

"What does he say, Bogy?" asked Jack impatiently.

"He says that she's a good distance out, but he thinks he can see a boat pulling towards the shore, though he's not sure, as whatever it was is too far off to make out, but he has left one of the boys to watch."

"That's all right. We're all ready for them. Now then, Harry, we must arrange some plans of defence. Come on, Bogy; we'll want you to help us. My idea is, that we put all the women and children into the fort, and two or three of the boys, who can keep the guns loaded, and who will hand them to Harry and me if we have to open fire; whilst you with the remainder go down to the shore to meet the boat, and hear what they've got to say for themselves."

"That won't do, Master Jack," said Bogy. "If they don't see any of the women or children, they will get suspicious; besides, they can see

that this is a small island, and they will know that there cannot be many inhabitants on it, and they might attack directly they land. It will be better for us all to show except you and Master Harry, who can remain in the fort ready with the guns. They will not fight if we are strong and armed with spears, but will try and get us on the schooner to barter. I know them, Master Jack. I was captured before."

"All right, that may be the best plan. You ought to know their ways better than we do, Bogy. Hallo! here comes the look-out man. He's running, too."

Again a long palaver took place between Bogy and the native.

"Bother these fellows, why don't they say what they've got to say at once without so much gesticulation and jaw?" said Harry. "What is it, Bogy?"

"He says a boat is coming, and she has only seven men in her."

"Then I say, let's give them a good dressing as soon as they land, or, better still, take them prisoners, capture the schooner, load her up with copra, and away we go."

"Yes, we'll do that if Hackett is in her, but

after all we may have been mistaken last night, and it would never do to make war on innocent traders, supposing it wasn't the *Pearl*. No, Bogy had better interview them whilst we stay in the fort ready for action if he should send word. Now, let's take up a position where we can watch the boat coming in."

"Yes, Master Jack is right, though I'm nearly sure it was the *Pearl*," said Bogy.

"Well, we'll just come and have a look at the boat. They won't be able to make us out if we stand amongst a lot of the natives, and then we can return to the fort if things look dangerous. Mind you let us know if Hackett is in her, Bogy, and we'll take him prisoner before he knows what's the matter."

The boat was rapidly approaching the island as the tide was setting in, and the sea being as smooth as glass, she slid through the water at the rate of knots propelled by four powerful oarsmen.

"They pull well, anyway, whatever their business may be. They're as good as any man-of-war boat; but we had better return before they can make us out. Good-bye, Bogy; take command, and see you let us know what takes place."

"I will, Master Jack ; I will send Peko with messages."

"Well, tell him not to get excited when he brings them, or else we shan't be able to understand a word."

Our heroes backed in amongst the trees, followed by two native boys, whom they took for the purpose of loading the guns in case they should be wanted. They were able to obtain a good view of the opening in the reef from where they were standing, but the boat's crew seemed to be uncertain where to land, and after resting on their oars for a spell, came round to the southward of the island.

"That's capital ! they won't find the proper opening in the reef," said Jack. "Though they can get into the lagoon that way, they will find it difficult to get out ; if we run across with our guns, we can pepper them well."

"They're sure to pull round the lagoon, for they'll know that they've come in on the wrong side, or they'll have a very good idea that they have. I wish they had come this way, for then we could have seen if Hackett was in the boat."

"Well, we'll soon get a message from Bogy, and if Hackett is with them, I'll shoot him if I can't take him prisoner."

"You're getting vengeful, Jack. Remember he's an old schoolfellow."

"I can't help that, Harry; he's a sneaky scoundrel, who's probably got many a good man murdered through his wretched treachery, and I should think I was doing a good turn to the whole civilised world if I did put him out of mess, though of course I would sooner take him prisoner."

"Yes, you're quite right, Jack; besides, it would be jolly to be skipper of the *Pearl*—she's a clipping craft."

Our heroes had to wait nearly an hour before they got a message from the front; in fact, they were on the point of going out for a reconnaissance on their own account, when they heard a rustle amongst the bushes, and Peko appeared. He informed them that Hackett was not with the boat's crew, and though Bogy did not like the look of the men, yet he did not know any of them. He thought it would be best if they would come and judge for themselves.

"Shall we go, Jack? though it would rather spoil our surprise for them should it after all prove to be the *Pearl*."

"Ask Bogy if he can't manage to slip away

and tell us what he thinks about the matter himself," said Jack, for Peko spoke such indifferent English that the boys were not quite sure that they had understood him aright.

"Yes, that's the thing. Let's get Bogy to come; you and the others can keep them in conversation, Peko; he can explain everything to us in two twos."

Peko immediately started off to deliver his message.

"It would never do for us to bombard a decent crew, and there must be scores of schooners like the *Pearl* trading in these seas; and after all we may be mistaken, as we only saw her by moonlight. I think we'll go and show ourselves and chance it," said Jack.

"Let's wait for a bit to see if Bogy comes. I should like to give Hackett a surprise if it is the *Pearl*; it would be a pity to spoil the fun by showing too soon."

"All right, just as you please."

In about twenty minutes Bogy arrived quite out of breath with running.

"Well, Bogy, what news?"

"They look a bad lot, Master Jack, but I don't see any of the old crew amongst them; they want us to go aboard. I pretended not

to speak much English, so they talked freely amongst themselves, and I heard one of them say, 'If we can't persuade them to come off, we must send for the Parson and see if he can't manage it, for they're a fine lot, and they wouldn't give us much trouble.'

"The scoundrels! Then it is Tom Hackett's vessel after all. I'll show them if we won't give them much trouble. Come on, Harry, we'll drive the blackguards off the island in a brace of shakes; fist hold of a rifle, Bogy, and tell the boys to bring some ammunition, and we'll make the rascals 'bout ship, I know."

Bogy led the way, and conducted the party to the southernmost part of the island.

"There they are," he said, as he came to a halt on the verge of the trees, "you can see without them seeing you from here."

"They certainly don't look over-prepossessing," said Jack, after surveying the strangers, who were talking to the assembled natives. They were all ashore, with the exception of one, who was minding the boat.

"Now, Bogy, you go down and join them, and Harry and I will come on presently."

"Will you bring the guns, or leave them with the boys, Master Jack?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet, but we'll spring a mine on them, never fear ; so away you go, and don't tell them that there are any white men on the island."

As soon as Bogy had departed, the boys looked carefully to the guns to see that they were properly loaded and ready for immediate use.

"Now, I'll tell you what we must do, Harry. You had better remain here with the two native boys, to look after the arms, whilst I go down and tackle these fellows. If you see me hold up my hand, fire a shot, only fire wide—mind you don't hit any of the natives, or there'll be a nice row—then run down to us and bring the guns. Bogy and I will come to meet you ; only mind, don't fire unless I hold my hand up."

"All right, only I don't quite see what you're driving at. I think the best plan would be to go down and tell them to 'get,' as Americans would say, and if they didn't, why, go for them without any more ado."

"No, I have a scheme in my head ; if it does not work, well then, we'll go for them, only I want to avoid bloodshed if possible."

"All right, I'm ready ; so if you are, off you go."

Jack did not advance straight out from the trees, but made a short *détour*, so as not to attract their attention towards Harry's place of concealment. The way he took enabled him almost to join the party before becoming visible, as the trees in that part grew almost down to the shore.

The man who was in charge of the boat's crew, and who was apparently the mate, was trying to persuade Bogy to come off to the vessel, when Jack suddenly made his appearance amongst them.

"Who the——?"

"Never mind who I am, but I'll tell you who you are," said Jack, cutting him short. "You're the mate of the schooner *Pearl*, and you're on a voyage. You call it seeking, I call it blackbirding, or kidnapping, if you prefer that. So the sooner you clear out of this the better—off you go," and Jack advanced towards the burly mate in a menacing attitude.

"You young cub, hold your jaw! How came you here?" answered the mate, putting his hand to his belt.

"Ah, stop that!" cried Jack. "What have you got? A six shooter? Clear out, I tell you, or there won't be a living sinner of you

left in five minutes. Drive them to the boats, Bogy."

The natives had become greatly excited, and only waited Bogy's word to fall upon the crew; but before he could give the word the mate shouted to his men, "Blaze away at them, lads, and then for the boats."

In a moment every one of the crew had pulled out a revolver, but before they could fire Jack held up his hand, and the next instant there was a puff of smoke from the trees, a loud report, and a bullet whistled overhead.

The crew seemed perfectly amazed. Bang! bang! came two more shots, and then with a shout Harry rushed from the trees, followed by the two native boys.

The crew then turned round, the mate setting them an example, still tugging away at his belt. It was evident that his pistol had got caught in his clothing, which prevented his drawing it, and he was afraid to use force lest it should go off, and so wound himself; several of the men fired as they turned and fled, and for a minute or so the ping of bullets resounded on all sides, but the natives, with a wild yell, rushed upon them, and had they not been very sharp they would have got killed to a man; as it was,

they all managed to get to the boat save one, who was pierced by a spear just as he was getting in, and, tumbling backwards, fell into the sea, his shipmates never waiting to pick him up.

"Tell Tom Hackett," yelled Jack, "that Jack Rollock is ashore here, so he had better make tracks, unless he wants another dressing worse than he had before." A revolver shot was the answer to this, but it flew harmlessly overhead, and buried itself in a cocoa-nut tree; the rest of the crew were too busy pulling out to a safe distance to bother about firing.

Jack, Harry, and Bogy each had a shot just to hasten the departure of the boat; they then turned their attention to their own men, two of whom lay wounded on the ground. "Only leg wounds," said Jack, taking a quick survey; "we'll soon put them right. Hallo! they're resting on their oars. We must give them a few more shots. Take careful aim this time."

Bang! Bang!

"That's the style; they're under way again with a vengeance. I do believe you hit the boat, Harry."

"I hope so, or better still, some of the blackguards in it."

"Now for the wounded. Have them taken

round to their huts, Bogy, and then we'll examine them; leave some men to guard this place, for they may come back again, though it's not very likely just yet, at any rate."

A hastily-constructed litter was made, and the two wounded men were placed on it, and conveyed across to the other side of the island to the village. On arrival there, Jack made a careful examination of their wounds.

"I think they're more frightened than hurt. See, they are only flesh wounds in the leg; they'll soon get better if they keep them clean and rest for a few days." Having bound them up, he left them in charge of their friends.

"If they had had spear wounds, Master Jack," said Bogy, "they wouldn't have minded them, but my countrymen always think that a bullet wound kills; that is why they are frightened."

"Well, you had better tell them that that is all nonsense, and if they do as I tell them, they will be well in a few days."

A vigilant look-out was kept on the island; the schooner lay becalmed until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when a nice little breeze sprang up, and she gathered way, and was soon out of sight.

"Hurrah!" cried the boys when they saw her sailing away.

"They've had enough of us; I didn't think Tom Hackett had much of a stomach for fighting unless he was backed up by plenty of guns, and his enemy had only spears and arrows. You see he did not come ashore himself. What an awful cur he is! I suppose he'll go and attack some poor defenceless people, and blaze into them if they show any resistance," said Jack.

"Well, I reckon he's had enough of Rollock Island. It's evident he doesn't like fire-arms. I wonder if they've found the body of the chap who got speared or drowned; let's go round and see. I don't think we need keep a guard on all night, do you?"

"No, I should think not, now that the schooner is out of sight; however, we had better keep some one on the look-out until it's dark."

The two boys, accompanied by both Bogy and Peko, again made their way across the island. They found the guard very much on the alert; they were not aware that the schooner had sailed away, and were greatly rejoiced when they heard that she had. Bogy's people were

certainly not very warlike, and though they could fight at a push, yet they were much fonder of a peaceful, indolent existence. They had brought in the body of the sailor which during the afternoon had floated ashore; he had a wound right through the back between the shoulders, quite sufficient to have caused his death, even if he had fallen into the boat instead of into the water.

"Well, I suppose we ought to give him a Christian burial, poor fellow, though he must have been a blackguard. Tell them to dig a hole, Bogy, and we'll bury him at once."

As the boys laid the body in the earth, Jack said a few prayers over him, and whilst the natives were filling up the grave, Harry made a rough cross, which they stuck in the ground to mark the spot.

This unpleasant duty over, they withdrew the guard, who returned to the village, where general rejoicings were being held to celebrate the defeat of the foe.

A nice steady breeze continued to blow, and the inhabitants of Rollock Island turned in that night feeling quite secure, and thinking that the schooner with her bloodthirsty crew were miles away, probably preparing to raid some

other island where the means of defence were not so formidable.

"Well, good-night, Jack," said Harry, as he prepared for a snooze. "I hope we haven't acted unwisely in withdrawing our guard; the schooner might return—she may only have stood off until dark."

"I don't think so, Harry. I imagine they have had enough of us. You see they're not good honest fighting men, and they didn't relish it when they found that we had fire-arms. No, I think we may sleep without fear of attack, and I've told Bogy in case of an alarm all hands are to make for the fort. We can easily hold our own against any party they might send ashore."

"Well, we won't meet trouble half way, so good night."

Soon all were sleeping quietly on the island. Our heroes were young and inexperienced, otherwise they would have known that through over-confidence many a battle has been lost, and through want of a proper look-out many a ship has been lost. The *Pearl*, as Harry had suggested, had only stood off the land during the day, but as soon as darkness came on they had gone about and were now stand-

ing close in. Had there been even one man left on the look-out on the island things might have turned out differently from the way they did, for he could have easily seen the schooner in the moonlight as she came in close to the reef; but all slept, and the vessel, when within a quarter of a mile off, hove to; a boat was lowered, and a strong well-armed party pulled slowly ashore; their oars were muffled, so as not to make the slightest sound. Slowly and quietly she made for the opening where they had landed in the morning.

No uneasy dreams disturbed the sleeping inhabitants, tired out as they were after the unusual and strange events of the past day.

Suddenly all were roused by the report of a rifle, and before they could well collect their senses together, there was a vivid flash of light out at sea, followed by a rushing sound overhead, and then a loud explosion amongst the trees.

With a frantic yell the natives jumped to their feet.

"To the stockade!" yelled Jack. "Bogy, tell them it's only a shell they've fired."

Bogy shouted loudly to his companions, who were already making for their canoes, which were lying in the lagoon; a few stood for a

moment irresolute, but another shell from the schooner sent them flying pell-mell to the boats. At the same moment a volley of musketry was fired from the landing party.

"It's no good to try and stop them, Master Jack," shouted Bogy. "Come, we can't fight by ourselves. Come!" and Bogy made after his comrades. The two boys stood for a minute not liking to bolt, but a moment's reflection showed that it would only be courting certain death for them to make a stand by themselves; they could hear the attacking party making their way through the trees.

"I must have a shot at them before I go." Seizing a rifle he let drive in the direction of the approaching footsteps. A heavy black cloud slowly sailed across the, till then, clear sky, obscuring the moon.

"Now, then, we must fly, or they will shove off without us," and they turned and ran down to the shore.

Bang—bang—bang, came several shots from the trees.

"Where are you, Bogy?" yelled Jack, as they got safely to the beach.

"Here—this way, quick!" came the voice of Bogy.

Both boys plunged into the lagoon. Harry succeeded in climbing, or rather being dragged into the canoe. Jack was just about to follow suit, when there were shouts from the shore, followed immediately by the splash of men rushing into the water.

“Quick—quick!” yelled Bogy.

Jack clutched hold of the canoe, but at the same moment he received a tremendous blow on the head, and fell back nearly stunned; he heard confused noises and the sound of shot, but did not quite know what was taking place. Suddenly he felt as if he were being held under water, and all consciousness then left him.

When he again came to his senses, he found himself lying under some cocoa-nut palms, with his hands and legs securely lashed; a few yards from where he lay a large fire was burning, round which were seated a number of men. At first he could not recollect what had happened, but by degrees the events of the night rushed upon him with painful vividness.

“Then it’s all up with me,” he mused; “I’m a prisoner. It was too bad of Harry and Bogy to leave me like this, but I suppose they couldn’t help it. I wonder if they got off all right. Bother it, If we had only kept a look-out, we

might have driven the scoundrels off ; but no, the natives would never have stood shell-fire, not even if we had been within a dozen forts, let alone a bit of a stockade run up in one night. Oh, lor, my head does ache ! I hope they won't disturb me just yet ; it looks as if they were going to have a snooze before going back to the schooner. I wonder if I'll get a chance of escape ; I'll have a try if I get half a slant."

But unfortunately for Jack, one of the boat's crew kept awake, acting as sentry.

"No, there's no chance whilst that death's-head-looking Johnny keeps awake. I do hope the others got off all right. I think I'll kick up a row, and stop these chaps from sleeping ; it will be some satisfaction, anyway." But a moment's thought showed Jack that this would be a very foolish course, as, if he remained quite quiet, the sentry might possibly fall asleep, and then he would try to escape ; and with this object in view, he began to work his hands about in the hope of loosening the cords which bound him. But he soon found that he was far too securely lashed to be able to get adrift unaided.

"I wonder if I can prevail upon him to let me go. Poor old Ned turned out a trump ;

this chap might be all right if properly worked. I'll try him."

Jack did not like to speak, being afraid of rousing the others, so he began to roll from side to side, so as to attract the sentry's attention. For some time the man took no notice of his prisoner's movements, but it struck Jack that if he tried to roll away in amongst the trees, the man would be sure to follow, so as to bring him back. The place where he was lying was tolerably flat, so he began to wriggle his body towards a thick clump of trees. He had not gone more than a few feet when the sentry perceived his movements.

"I'll tell you what it is, my lad, if you try to get away, I'll just blow your conniving brains out ; so lie still, or else I'll make you so as you'll never move again. Do you hear?" he said, following up his speech with a horrible string of oaths.

"Look here," said Jack, "you don't know me and I don't know you, but I suppose you call yourself an Englishman. Well, I'm one too, and I haven't done you any harm, so just cast me adrift, and I'll make it worth your while."

"I wouldn't if you was to give me a thousand pounds," said the man, with an oath. "I've

heard of you before. You know us and the schooner too well, and the first man-of-war you was to come across you'd send after us, and get us all strung up. No, I tell you our orders is to bring you aboard the schooner, dead or alive. There is a gentleman there as has a small account as he is anxious to pay you."

"Do cast me adrift," said Jack imploringly; "there's a good chap. Do one good act in your life."

"If you don't stop your palaver I'll brain you where you lay, you young dog—mark that!"

Jack saw that it was no good trying to talk this surly blackguard over, so he simply said, "Well, it would have been a good thing for you if you *had* cast me adrift; but as you won't, well, you'll have to suffer for it."

"You threaten me!" cried the man in a fury, giving Jack a kick; "you threaten me! Why, I tells you I'll jump on your corpse within the next twenty-four hours, you young varmint;" and with this he withdrew, and once more took up his position by the fire, only keeping a sharp eye on his prisoner, who, finding escape utterly impossible, made the best of things, and soon dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

"HERE, come along, rouse up!" said a rough voice, the owner of which at the same time gave Jack a savage kick with a heavy boot.

"You brute!" cried Jack, as he endeavoured to spring up, quite forgetting that he was securely trussed like a chicken, and thus unable to move. "Ah! I know you wouldn't be so free with your boot if I had my liberty."

"Stop your gas, or you'll get something that hurts a bit more than a boot. Up you get!"

"You idiot, don't you see that I can't move?"

The man slackened the cord round his captive's feet, and then giving him a hoist, placed him on his feet.

"Now then, march, as the soldiers say; and mind you go straight, unless you want the contents of this sent through you," said the man, as he held a revolver close to Jack's head.

Jack made no answer, but hobbled as quickly as he could down to the boat, followed closely

by the man ; as soon as he was in her, the lashing was again tightened round his feet, and he was left to lie in the stern-sheets whilst the boat was pulled off to the schooner.

"Ah! I see you've got the one I wanted," shouted Tom Hackett, as the boat got alongside the vessel. "You shall have a double tot of grog, lads. Don't cast him adrift, men; we'll send a bowline over for him."

"Good-morning, Jack Rollock," continued Hackett, as Jack was hoisted aboard, and thrown on deck as if he had been a bundle of rags, or a bolt of canvas; "you see I've got you at last."

"You horrid cur, Hackett. It's a blessing for you that you took the precaution to keep these lashings on, or you might get your teeth knocked down your throat."

"Not tame yet?—ah, well you soon will be! Trice him up, lads, and teach him manners, and I'll double your allowance of grog for the remainder of the voyage."

Jack was at once seized and triced up to the mainmast, where he got three dozen from a rope's end. He made no resistance, and by a great effort restrained himself from even groan-

ing or begging for mercy, but the effort was too great, and before the end of the castigation he had fainted, and the cruel blows fell painlessly on his inanimate body. A couple of buckets of water, however, brought him to, and he was left for a while, his limbs tightly lashed, his body bleeding and sore, drenched through with salt water, lying on the main hatch. The schooner had filled her sails, and was standing away to the northward, but the breeze was very light, so she made but little way.

Jack almost forgot his bodily pain in his far more acute mental anguish. He was assailed with the same kind of vengeful thoughts that he had been subject to when a boy at school, and to which he had been a stranger since going to sea.

"If I could only punch Hackett's head I would die happy, for I know he means to kill me." With such like thoughts he tried to wriggle clear of his lashings, but they were too tight, so he lay back and indulged in plans as to what he would do if Hackett ever fell into his power. Suddenly the thought flashed through his mind that he might possibly be spending his last afternoon in this world, for he knew Hackett

would stick at nothing, not even at taking his life. "My God," he groaned aloud, "I am a wicked wretch spending my last hours in thoughts of revenge, instead of in penitence. O God, forgive me, and let me forgive him!"

Jack had a hard struggle. He could not help thinking of the cruelty he had been subjected to, through what ought to have made Hackett and himself good friends, for it all originated in a good stand-up school-boy fight, the best thing in the world to make fast chums after it is over. It was hard to forgive such a brutal and unforgiving creature as Tom Hackett had proved himself to be, but Jack was a plucky boy, and he prayed fervently that he might forgive his enemy, and by degrees his bruised back seemed to hurt less, and before long the only wish he had was that his old school-fellow Tom Hackett might be made to see his evil ways, and turn into a good and honest man.

Having mastered his bad thoughts he felt a great deal calmer, and troubled himself but little about what was in store for him. His great anxiety was that Harry should have escaped. "They will probably make straight for Bogy Island," he thought, "and once there

they will stand a good chance of not falling in with the schooner again."

What little wind there had been had died quite away, and the *Pearl* rolled lazily in a long undulating swell. It was well on in the afternoon when Jack was roused from his reverie, by the man who had acted as the sentry over him whilst a prisoner on the island.

"Come aft along with me, young chicken-heart. I've been watching you this long day through; you didn't know it, and I could see yer was a-thinking about yer mamma. Come along, and no more bother with yer, for the Parson wants to speak to yer."

Jack grew furious with the man at the way he spoke. "You cut-throat pirate, I'll be even with you yet, you and the whole crew, including the Parson, as you call him—the devil would be a better name," he shouted at the top of his voice. "Now, if you want me aft, you had better loose the lashing round my ankles."

"No, no, you ain't tame yet; I'll roll you there. Come along, mate," he shouted to another of the crew, who was standing close by, "just lend me a hand to tumble this piece of goods along to the Parson, as wants to interview him."

"Lend you a hand, did you say? Better use a foot, mate; we might get another extra tot of grog if we do things a bit refined like."

The two men, or rather brutes, roared with laughter, and, using their feet as propellers, rolled our hero aft. It was fortunate for him that they had no boots on, otherwise the pain to his already bruised back would have been insufferable; as it was, it was pretty acute, but Jack shut his eyes, so that he should not get giddy, and stiffened his body out, so that he should roll easily. He heard Hackett laugh as the two men rolled him aft.

"Here he is, sir," said one of the men, "bung up, bilge free;¹ if that ain't worth a good stiff tot, you don't catch me on a black-birding cruise again."

"Put him on his pins," said Hackett, "and you shall have some grog presently."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the men, as they lifted Jack up into a standing position.

"Hackett, I always knew you were a black-guard, but I never could have believed you were as bad as this," said Jack, bursting with indignation at his horrible treatment.

¹ An expression used by sailors when stowing barrels

"No, you never were very bright, Jack Rollock! I've got a scar on the back of my head. You know who gave it me."

"You'd have another on the front of it if I had my hands free for a few minutes, you coward."

Hackett motioned for the men to withdraw, which they did somewhat reluctantly, wishing to hear a little more as to the cause of the Parson's hatred for the prisoner. As soon as they were out of ear-shot, Hackett drew near to Jack, and, speaking in low tones, said—

"Yes, you gave me that scar, and it was owing to you that I afterwards got expelled from St. Chad's, and it was owing to that, that I did not get a lot of money left me. Now, perhaps you can see why I hate you, and why I swore that, if I ever came across you, I would have your life; and die you must, a dog's death too! To-morrow morning at sunrise you shall hang from the peak; I swear it. I shall let you live long enough to see the sun rise, and then up you go. You will die, and I shall live happy to think I am revenged."

Jack was struck perfectly aghast at the cold-blooded, malignant way in which Hackett spoke.

He had literally hissed out the sentence, looking the while like a very fiend. It was some minutes before our hero could find his voice to reply, but when he did, it was not to throw idle and furious words back at his persecutor. He was too horrified at finding a human being so like the evil one to do that. He certainly wanted his life spared, but he did not mean to beg for it. He looked steadily at Hackett for a few seconds, and then said—

“Hackett, you must be either mad or a devil. I hope you’re mad, for then——”

“Dry up with your infernal cant, or I’ll gag you!”

Jack had no wish to undergo the torture of the gag again; he had too lively a recollection of the last time that he had been subjected to it to court it again by any indiscretion of language; so he wisely held his tongue.

“Ah,” continued Hackett, when he saw the effect his threat had produced, “you didn’t like it when you had it before. I’ve a good mind to give you another dose; but as there are no more of your kidney aboard, I’ll let you alone; besides, the more comfortable you are, the more you’ll want to live. But you shall die as

soon as you've had a good look at the bright sun. Here, lay aft, you two men, and take him on to the main hatch. Tell the cook to dish him up a good feed, and give him a blanket."

"Ay, ay, sir ; we'll see to it."

"Ain't the Parson turning mighty kind all at once? I suspects the youngster has talked him over," said one of the men to his mate.

"Not he," answered the other ; "I knows him too well. He's only putting in the sugar, so as the lad will feel the bitter all the more when it's to come."

The men returned after having left Jack safely deposited on the main hatch ; they, however, first took the precaution to pass a rope round his waist, making the end fast to a ring bolt.

"That will keep him from trying to roll overboard," said the one who had been the original sentry. "It's always as well to be on the safe side, for some folk prefer drowning to passing the night awaiting for a hoist in the morning ; they have no consideration for the feelings of the spectators."

With this jest they shambled away forward.

Jack was thankful to be left alone ; for though in any ordinary ship, no matter how

calm the night might have been, the decks would not have been so deserted as those of the *Pearl* were, there would at least have been a hand on the forecastle-head on the look-out, also one at the wheel, besides the officer of the watch on the quarter-deck. But it was not so on this nefarious schooner ; all the seamen were in the forecastle, and the officers were apparently in the cabin, for there was no sound fore or aft, except that made by the cook, who was preparing the evening meal, and occasionally some angry oath from the forecastle broke the (to Jack) sweet silence, and polluted the soft tropical evening air.

"I suppose they're playing cards below," thought the captive, as suddenly the voices of two men in angry altercation broke the stillness. "Well, it's better than having them on deck, anyway. I do hope Hackett meant it when he said I was to have a good feed ; I could eat a rhinoceros half-cooked, I believe. Hanging won't be half so bad after one has fed as before."

At this thought Jack was overwhelmed by his desperate position, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"What's it all for?" he murmured. "O

God! what have I done?" And lying on his stomach, his head resting on the tarpaulin which covered the hatch—for his arms being lashed prevented him from using them as a pillow—he sobbed silently and bitterly. It seemed terribly hard to die without seeing home after having been through so many narrow shaves. "Well, Hackett must be mad, or he couldn't be such a brute!" he thought, his feelings having been somewhat relieved by his tears; "but where he picked up such an infernal set of ruffians for a crew puzzles me."

His reverie was cut short by the sound of some one coming along the deck.

"Here you are," said a voice, which he recognised as that of his original captor; "here's your last meal as ever you gets this side of the grave; there's plenty of it to last you till morning. I calls it downright extravagance on the part of the Parson to waste good chuck on one as has got to die at daylight. A few biscuits and a drink of water ought to do. Howsomer, he's the owner, and has got to pay the piper; so it's nought to do with me. Now, I'm going to cast your hands adrift; but I tell you, if you try on any games, you'll get a shot through

you before you knows where you is. I keeps this here barker clapped again your pericardium the whole time as you eats ; so just be careful to mind your manners, and don't say no grace."

The man deposited a large plate of steaming sea-pie and a hook-pot full of tea on the hatch, whilst he loosened the cords round Jack's hands.

"Now then, eat away, and don't take over long about it, as I wants to get below again," he said, at the same time pressing the muzzle of his revolver against the back of Jack's head.

"All right, you needn't keep that thing there," said Jack, "I'm not going to attempt to get away, at least not till I've finished this sea-pie."

"I'll keep it where I likes, so just you get on with your victuals."

Jack ate ravenously. He had had nothing since the evening before, so was consequently half famished. The man retired a few paces when he saw that his prisoner was fully employed with the pie, but he still kept him covered with the revolver. As Jack ate he began to wonder if this man was as big a brute as he appeared to be on the surface. "I might be able to talk him round : I'll try when I've finished this," he thought, his spirits greatly

revived under the stirring influence of the sea-pie and the tea. Before the meal he had been down-hearted and despondent, but now he felt fit to run any risk to regain his liberty.

"Have you finished?" asked the man abruptly, seeing that Jack was no longer eating fast.

"Not quite. I say, will you leave my hands free to-night? I can sleep so much more comfortably."

"You'll sleep comfortably by this time to-morrow, I warrant, and have your hands free too, I expects, but you'll have them kept lashed to-night with a double frapping, I tells you; and if you asks me any more such like accommodations, the Parson says as how I've got to put the gag on for a bit."

Jack saw it was no good trying to enlist the sympathies of this man, so he finished his meal in silence, and then submitted quietly and without protest to have the lashing again tightened around his wrists.

"Now go, you black-hearted villain," he said, as the man finished securing him, "and may you and the whole of your shipmates sleep sound."

"Not so sound as you will soon, I'll lay," said the man with a cruel laugh, and then,

Jack up the empty plate and hook-pot, shambled away forward. As he stooped he dropped something from out of the front of his loose-fitting shirt, but he did not notice it, and it was left lying on the hatch.

Jack's heart nearly leapt out of his mouth as the thought flashed through his mind that it might be a knife, but a moment's consideration showed him that this could not be. For, in the first place, a knife would have made more noise in its fall, and in the second, no sailor would be likely to carry a loose knife in the breast of his shirt, certainly not unless it had a lanyard, in which case it would not have fallen. "I wonder what it is—perhaps only a piece of biscuit; I did leave a little. I'll wait a few minutes and then grope about until I find it."

The footsteps of the man had died away, and all was again quiet, when Jack wriggled across to where he heard the thing fall. Not having the use of his hands, he used his face as a feeler; it soon came in contact with a small light box.

"Matches! Hurrah! I'll get a smoke anyway." This was not such an easy matter, as his tobacco and pipe were in the breast of his

shirt. "If I could only get my hands free," he mused, "but I can't. I must try some other plan." By dint of rolling about and nearly standing on his head, he by degrees managed to get these articles to fall out. The tobacco was wet and flabby, owing to the drenching he had got in the morning, but with patient working, he after a time managed to pull sufficient of the centre of the plug which was fairly dry to pieces and to fill his pipe. Now for a light. The only person on deck was the cook, who was still busy in his galley, so he had no fear of attracting attention should he succeed in striking one of the matches. Getting the box between his knees, he drew a match out with his teeth, and after two or three unsuccessful attempts managed to light it; then he remembered that the match blazing away in his mouth and the pipe on the hatch was absolutely useless, and he had to abandon all hope of solacing the weary hours by smoking.

Hackett and the officers having finished dinner, or whatever meal it was, came on deck, and walked about aft talking in low tones. Presently eight bells struck, the mate went forward to the forecabin and shouted down the

scuttle for the men to lay aft for their grog. They came tumbling up, and each received his tot.

"Now, lads," said the mate, who had commanded the attacking party on the previous night, "lower away the peak halyards, and make a single block fast to the end of the main peak, and reeve a piece of this rattling line through it, and then you can turn in for the night, except the watchman, unless a breeze springs up, and in the morning you can see the friend of the blacks dance a hornpipe in mid air. Remember, lads, it was owing to him your shipmate got killed."

"I don't blame him for that," said one of the men, "but he knows us all by sight now, and could swear against us if he ever got free."

"Of course he could," said Hackett. "Dead men tell no tales. Up he goes as soon as ever the sun shows its nose. Do you hear, lads?"

The whole of the schooner's crew now went below, with the exception of one man, who took up his position aft on the wheel grating, and Jack was left alone with only the stars as companions to gaze at, and to think of his mother and his home, and also to think of that long home to which he was so soon to go.

CHAPTER XXI

WAITING FOR DEATH

SLOWLY the night wore on. Not a breath of wind ruffled the calm surface of the ocean. The swell had quite subsided, and the schooner lay motionless, bathed in a flood of silvery moonlight, the only thing that cast a dark shadow on the peaceful glistening expanse of water.

It was a lovely scene, and Jack, in spite of his desperate position, could not help enjoying it. He had quite made up his mind that in the morning he would have to die. He saw no chance of escape. At first he had hope that some of the crew might take pity on him and let him go free, but as hour after hour wore on, and no one took any notice of him, he gave up all hope, and determined that he would die like a British sailor. No flinching or funking. The only thing that troubled him now was occasionally the old feeling of vengeance, of what he would do if he did by any means get clear. But he knew it was wrong to die with such

feelings, and he manfully strove against them, and they came back with less force as the time for his execution drew near.

He did not feel a bit inclined to sleep. The night had seemed interminable, and he felt an intense longing to know the time. He began to wonder if the watchman would tell him. He rather feared to call him, lest getting angry at being disturbed he should apply the gag to prevent further trouble ; but after some consideration he determined to call for him.

"Quarter-deck," he shouted.

"What do you want?" came a rough voice. At the same time the man made his way to the main hatch.

"You might give me a drink of water, will you?" said Jack, by way of opening the conversation.

"Well, I don't mind doing that," answered the man, and he went forward and filled the dipper from the water breaker and brought it to Jack.

"Ah! that's nice," said our hero, as he finished the welcome liquid. "I say, what's the time?"

"About a quarter to one. What! are you in a hurry to get it over?"

Jack felt that this man at least was not so bad as some of the others.

"I wonder if I can persuade him to let me go. I could get ashore in a life-belt."

"Look here, will you give me a smoke?"

"Yes, I'll do that for you," answered the man; "have you got a pipe?"

"Yes, there's one on the main hatch. Just pick it up, and light it for me, or you may as well fill it—the tobacco that's in it is rather wet."

The man filled the pipe and lit it, giving it to Jack in full swing. Then he said, "That will help to pass the time away for you. But tell me, why does the Parson want to hang you? That's what none of us can make out, unless it is that you might turn evidence agin him. We can all see that, but there's som'ut more as makes him so vicious."

"Well, it's a long yarn, but as you don't seem so bad as the rest of your shipmates, I'll just give you an outline of it," and Jack gave a brief sketch of the reason of Hackett's hatred for him. The man gave a long whistle when he had finished speaking, and then said, "I knowed he was a bad 'un, and for the matter of that, we're all in the same boat aboard of this here

schooner, or on any other vessel as is in this trade; but though I don't think much of killing a native if he comes in my way, I would think twice afore I took a countryman's life, bad as I am."

"Well, cast me adrift, give me a life-buoy, and let me take my chance; you'll have done one good thing in your life," said Jack, hope once more reviving in his heart.

"Couldn't do it, lad. I'd have to swing instead of you, and I ain't ready for it. I tells you, we ain't over-brave, we as sails in this trade."

"I don't know that," and Jack told him the yarn about poor Ned. When he had finished, the man for some time stood silently in thought. After a few minutes he said, "And do you think that, when he come to die like that, that he was forgiven for all as he had done before?"

"I should say certainly, but it's not fair of me to ask you to risk your life for me, but when you get to some civilised port, promise me that you will write to my mother, and tell her I am dead. Can you remember her name and address if I tell it you?"

"I can, but I won't tell her you're dead, for

as I'm a living sinner, I'll let you go and chance it!" and with these words he pulled out his sheath knife, and was about to sever the lashings when a footstep was heard aft and Hackett's voice shouted, "Who's on watch?"

The man paused, then returning his knife to the sheath, cried, "Here you are, sir," and shambled away aft.

"Who were you talking to?" Jack heard Hackett ask.

"That prisoner of yours," answered the man; "he asked me for a drink of water."

"All right, go and call the next relief. The glass is a bit low, we'll have two on watch for the rest of the night."

"I'm done for," thought Jack. "O God, help me, and reward him, for he would have risked his life to save mine. No, my time is up. O Lord, give me strength to die like a sailor and a Christian."

In a few minutes another man came up from the forecastle, and Jack recognised him in the moonlight to be the one whom, next to Hackett, he considered his greatest enemy. It was his original jailer on the island.

"No chance now; no hope!" thought Jack,

as this man passed him on his way aft. "Perhaps it's better, for the chap who would have released me would probably have had to pay for his goodness with his life. It was selfish of me to ask so much from him."

The two watchmen remained aft, and Hackett again went below, and Jack was left alone with his thoughts. His pipe was still alight. Suddenly the idea flashed through his mind, that if he could only knock the lighted tobacco on to the rope which held his wrists it might possibly burn through. Once let him get his hands free he could easily cast his feet adrift, and then by leaping overboard would chance drowning. It was better than hanging, any way, and it would disappoint Hackett.

Turning the pipe over in his mouth he managed to get the burning tobacco on to the rope, and he soon had the satisfaction of knowing from the smell that it had begun to smoulder.

"Now, if I manage to get adrift and jump overboard, I'm nearly sure to get drowned; besides, even if I make no splash, I shall be probably spotted by those aft, and they'll have a boat over in no time. Hallo! my 'bacca has gone out. It's no good, I'll make up my mind that

I've got to hang. About four hours more and I'll be at rest. O God, I should like to live!"

Hour after hour passed by, and Jack remained lying on his back, gazing up into the cloudless starlit heavens, and almost longing for the time to come when he should be launched into eternity, and yet every now and again an intense longing for life would take possession of him, and he was between two minds as to whether to make a fight for it at the last moment should opportunity afford, or to die calmly.

Presently he heard some one coming forward. It was the cook, who went straight into the galley and lit the fire, so as to have a brew of coffee ready for the men at daylight. Jack now felt that his time was indeed drawing to a close, and in desperation he tried to burst the cords round his wrist; but it was no good, they did not yield a fraction of an inch, and he again lay back in despair.

The stars began to grow pale, and the light of the moon to lose its brightness, as the grey of dawn suffused the heavens. He watched the light stealing into the sky, and one by one the objects on the schooner's deck around him became visible.

He felt a sickly terror creep over him as the light increased. He knew not what to do. He could not even pray ; he felt as if he were turned to ice. Presently the cook came out of the galley and handed him a pannikin of coffee. "Here, drink this. I've made it cool enough for you to swallow," and he held the pannikin to his lips.

The moment Jack had swallowed the invigorating beverage his pluck returned, and he prayed fervently that he might not show any signs of fear. "After all," he thought, "I might have died years ago of some disease, or been drowned. My present fatal disease will be hanging. I daresay it's no worse than small-pox or cholera, of which thousands die every year. No, my time has come, and this is the way I've got to die."

He then once more poured forth his soul to God in prayer. He prayed for courage, he prayed for forgiveness, for his mother and friends, and lastly, after an effort, for his enemy.

The men now began to tumble up from below, and presently Jack heard the skipper and Hackett talking on the quarter-deck.

"If they would only quarrel I might stand a

chance yet," he thought, for by the sound of their voices it was evident that they were arguing, though he could not hear what it was all about. Hope again somewhat revived, but by degrees the argument got less heated, and shortly afterwards he heard Hackett sing out to a couple of seamen—

"Bring him along, lads, the sun will soon show. There's not much time to lose."

"At last! O God, give me courage!"

Two men now came to the hatch.

"Now then, up you get! you've got to give us a dance in the air. Stand up!"

"Lift me or cast me adrift, or carry me if you like; that's better," said Jack doggedly.

"Cast the lashing off his feet, mate," said one of them. "I've got him tight. He's a slippery customer, but he won't get away from me."

One of the men stooped down to undo the lashing, whilst the other took a firm grip of Jack's collar.

As soon as his feet were set free he was pushed along the deck until he came as far as the binnacle stand. Here they stopped, for they could not have got much farther without going over the stern.

The mate shouted for all hands to lay aft, and Hackett called down the companion for the steward to bring up a bucket of grog.

Whilst this was being served out Jack had an opportunity of looking round. It was still a dead calm, and a rather thick mist hung over the ocean away to the eastward, but it was plain by the light that the sun must have already risen, though it had not succeeded in penetrating the mist. From the peak dangled a line rove through a block with a noose at the end of it. Jack did not now feel the least bit of fear. He stood perfectly calm, as firm as a rock, and he thanked God for it.

As soon as the men had finished their grog Hackett told one of them to put the noose round the captive's neck. This being done Jack was told to climb up on the wheel grating. Just as he was about to obey, Hackett shouted, "Hold hard a minute! haul his neck lanyard taut, and then cast his hands adrift. Look slippery." The next minute he had his hands free. The thought rushed through his mind to leap overboard, but he suddenly remembered that the noose was round his neck, so he was as much a prisoner as ever.

"Now, up you get on the grating." Jack obeyed with alacrity, wanting to get it all over.

Hackett, who had been keeping at a respectful distance, now drew near, saying—

"So now, Jack Rollock, I'm going to be revenged. I swore I would be, and I'm only waiting to give you a peep at the sun as I promised I would, and I always keep my word." The men who had hauled on to the rope gathered close round to hear what was said, for Hackett was speaking low, as his words were only intended for his victim. "You see I've had your lashings cast adrift, as I have sworn to see you dance and struggle in the air, and I'm going to."

This brutal speech was too much for Jack. Leaping off the grating, he landed his tormentor one between the eyes, which sent him staggering backwards.

"There you are, Tom Hackett! I always wanted to teach you manners ; I hope that will !"

"Tauten up the line, you fools," yelled the mate. "What did you slack it for? Here, run him up."

"No, no," shouted Hackett, "wait till I can see. I'll be all right in a minute."

Jack murmured, "God forgive me, but I couldn't help it."

Just at that minute a breeze swept across the glassy expanse of ocean. The mist divided, and the sun shone forth.

"There she rises!" shouted two or three of the men. "Can you see now, sir?" some one asked derisively. "If so, give the word, and up he goes."

"Run away with him, lads, and then grog," yelled Hackett furiously.

The next instant the rope tightened round Jack, and to the "way-a-a's" of the sailors he was run up to the peak. Fiery sparks seemed to shoot through his eyes, a singing, rushing noise made him feel as if his head would burst, a tremendous crash, a feeling of falling, and all was black and nothingness.

CHAPTER XXII

A TIMELY SHOT

To return to Harry and his dusky companions, whom we left escaping in the canoes from Rollock Island.

"Give way, Bogy," shouted Harry, as he caught hold of an inanimate body and hauled it into the canoe. "I've got him!"

Amid a shower of bullets the natives paddled towards the opening in the barrier reef, and were soon safely out to sea. They did not cease their exertions until well away from the island; they feared lest another boat might have been sent from the schooner to intercept them; but after a while, there being no signs of a pursuit, they took an easy. By this time the cloud which had obscured the moon had passed away, and in the pale light which now showed its rays, Harry, to his horror and consternation, found that the body which he had dragged from the water was not his chum Jack Rollock, but one of the schooner's brutal crew.

"O Bogy," he shouted in despair, "it's not Jack! What shall we do?"

"Not Master Jack!" cried Bogy and Peko in dismay, ceasing paddling.

Harry for a moment considered. "We must go back and rescue him," he said. "I can't leave my chum. How many have we in the canoes?"

"Nine, but three are women."

"Any ammunition?"

"I have some seven rounds, but they are wet."

"And Peko, how many has he?"

"Five, all wet."

"I have only three. What duffers we were to leave the boxes up in the stockade. Look here, if we go back we might surprise them, and rescue him," said Harry, after a few moments' thought.

"No good, Master Harry. We had better try to keep the schooner in sight; they would not be able to see us, and we could attack them before the moon rises to-morrow night."

"But it may be too late," said Harry, yet he saw that it would be perfectly useless to go back to the island and attack them that night, as he felt sure if they had stopped ashore they would have left some one on the look-out, probably several, and they would, he was certain, be seen before they could land. A well-

directed volley would sink their canoes, and then there would be no chance either for themselves or for Jack. The more he thought over Bogy's plan, the better he liked it. He knew these natives to be as sly as foxes, and they could swim so well that they would be able to keep the canoe at a safe distance whilst Bogy or Peko could get silently to the vessel, and probably in the dark climb aboard and release Jack, if he were allowed to live so long, which seemed doubtful, judging from past experiences of Hackett's character. Though it seemed to Harry something like deserting his chum, yet it was evidently the wisest plan.

"I'm afraid there's little chance of us saving him," he at last said to Bogy, "but you think your scheme well out. In the meantime we'll just paddle easy until the morning. Now then for this scoundrel—I wonder if he's dead."

Harry felt the man all over. He was still breathing, but very feebly. He was bleeding profusely from a bullet wound in the neck.

Harry bound him up, and then sat down in the bottom of the canoe and thought of his chum.

"I shouldn't think they would kill him, Bogy," he said after a time.

"They are bad men, very bad men, Master

Harry! I have seen them kill my countrymen by the score. They are treacherous."

"I know that, but I shouldn't think they would kill him in cold blood. Hackett had a certain amount of provocation last time, you must remember."

Bogy said nothing, so Harry interpreted his silence as showing that he had but little hope.

During the night, or rather towards early morning, they sighted two of the other canoes.

"Keep them in sight, Bogy; we must find out what they intend doing. You had better hail them now."

A few moments' paddling brought them close together. When Bogy hailed them, he learnt that they were making for Bogy Island, as they deemed themselves safer there for the present, and they could also warn their countrymen that the *Pearl* was cruising about and might pay them a visit, so that they would not be taken unawares.

Having ascertained this information, Harry gave orders for his canoe to pull more towards the eastward, as he did not wish to miss sighting the schooner at daylight.

The night dragged slowly on. The wounded man scarcely moved. Harry felt his heart once or twice, and found that he was still alive. The

natives in the boat, on finding that he was an enemy, wanted to kill him, but Harry would not hear of it, and told Bogy to tell them that he would defend him with his life ; so they let the matter drop.

At last daylight began to break.

"Do you think you could find the reef where the wreck is, Bogy?"

"I think so, Master Harry."

"Well, the schooner must be between there and the island. If we make in that direction we shall probably sight her, and if we went there we could at least get something to eat. There are some bad biscuits and a few chunks of putrid pork in some of the barrels we left in her."

"We had better stay about here, Master Harry, for we can get back to the island in a day or so, and there is nothing to drink on Skeleton Reef."

"That's true enough. All right ; just paddle away to the east'ard gently, and we shall probably sight the *Pearl* in plenty of time to board her by nightfall ; there's hardly been any wind, so she won't have got far."

The weather, though fine, was rather eccentric. In some parts of the ocean there was not

a breath of wind, and the sea was as smooth as glass, whilst in others they could see the water cut up as if a strong breeze were blowing.

Harry was dreading lest one of these slants had caught the *Pearl*, and had enabled her to stand away off the land, for the morning was wearing on; as yet they had got no sight of her. The wounded man grew restless under the heat of the sun; they had nothing with them to make an awning. He presently began to rave, and it became necessary to hold him down at times, though he did not take much of that, being too weak from loss of blood to have much strength left. He kept moaning for water, but there was none to give him, so they had to let him suffer. Occasionally he would burst forth with a volley of horrible oaths, but always ended up with a piteous cry for water. About mid-day, after a terrible paroxysm, he died.

"Poor fellow," said Harry, as he felt him to make sure he was dead, "he might have lived for many a year if he hadn't taken up with this accursed trade. Lend me a hand, Bogy, and we'll put him over."

Harry said a short prayer, and they then launched him into the great deep.

They had nothing to sink him with, so he floated alongside. "Tell them to paddle away, Bogy, and let us leave him." For some time they could tell where the body was by the number of birds which flew over and around the remains of what had once been an innocent child.

Peko, who had been scanning the horizon for some time, suddenly yelled out something in his own language.

"What is it? the schooner?"

"Yes," he answered, pointing to the westward.

Harry looked, and there sure enough he saw a vessel, a schooner, and she scudding along before what appeared to be a strong breeze, and heading right for them.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Harry. "It's the *Pearl*, sure enough; how on earth did she get over there?"

"I don't know," answered Bogy; "but we must pull, or she will take us."

Pull they did, but the vessel came up to them hand over hand. Harry, who never took his eyes off her, suddenly exclaimed in great excitement, "Avast pulling—she's not the *Pearl*!"

Peko jumped up, and in his haste would have capsized the canoe had it not been for her outriggers, which kept her steady.

"No, no," he shouted, clapping his hands ;
"she no *Pearl*."

The vessel bore down on them, but as she got close the breeze died away and left her becalmed.

"Pull towards her, lads ; I do believe she's a man-of-war. Yes, thank God, she flies the white ensign !"

In less than a quarter of an hour the canoe was alongside of her Majesty's schooner *Lynx*, whose duty it was to protect the unfortunate natives from the ravages of the rascally cut-throats who are commonly known as Black-birders.

At first the natives in the canoe were rather doubtful about boarding her, but Bogy and Peko set their fears at rest by leading the way.

As soon as Harry was aboard he was taken aft, where he gave the lieutenant who was in command a short sketch of their adventures, whilst he regaled himself with a good square meal.

"The *Pearl*?" said the lieutenant ; "that's the vessel we've been after for nearly two years, only we have never been able to come up to her. She can sail like a witch. We nearly caught her once, after a chase of over a week, but it came on to blow a living gale of wind,

and we lost her. I believe she had a cargo of natives aboard her that time. She was making for Torres Straits when we first fell in with her, but she altered her course and stood for the coast of New Zealand, looking as innocent as a dove, but we knew her, only couldn't come up with her before it came on to blow."

"That must have been the time that she picked us up," said Harry. "Ned, the man who liberated us, told us they had been chased by a man-of-war schooner, and that then it blew so hard that she had to run before it for days, and that's how she came to be off the New Zealand coast."

"Well, we mustn't miss her this time. I hope we'll be able to save your chum," said the lieutenant kindly. "I wish we could get a breeze. I'll get the chart out, and then perhaps you will be able to show me where you think she will be now."

Harry pored over the chart for some time.

"I should say she's about here," he said, pointing to a place on the chart. "I see our island is not marked, nor yet the reef where the wreck is, but that is her probable position, providing she has not picked up a breeze."

"A south-easterly course ought to bring us

up to her, but we can't do anything with this Paddy's hurricane blowing; we must wait. I dare say we shall get a few catspaws, and be able to work along. I shouldn't say she is more than twenty miles away. If I was sure she had been becalmed all the time, I would send a boat's party away, but she might have picked up a breeze such as we have just lost, and they might as well have to look for a needle in a haystack as for such a slippery craft as the *Pearl*."

"She's evidently not got any natives aboard," said Harry, "and will be making for some island to get them; so you might intercept her."

"I'll do my best, lad. Now you turn in; I'll promise to do my utmost to find her, and to have you roused if we get a breeze;" and calling a steward, he told him to take Harry to a berth, and look after him well.

The steward was in a great state of excitement at the prospect of capturing the *Pearl*, but Harry felt despondent, as he feared, even if they did fall in with her, they would be too late to save Jack's life.

"Cheer up, sir!" said the steward, "we'll save your shipmate. Have a good sleep now,

and when I rouse you, you'll see we'll have the schooner in chase ;" so saying he shut the door of the berth, and departed, and Harry was soon in a deep sleep, which he much needed after the strange adventures of the past twenty-four hours.

When he awoke it was night. A lamp was burning in the berth, and he could hear, by the ripple of the water alongside, that the schooner had way, though there could not be much breeze, as she was as steady as a rock. Pulling on his boots and his coat, for these were the only garments he had divested himself of on turning in, he went on deck.

"Oh, so you've woke up without being called," said the lieutenant, who was walking up and down the quarter-deck on the weather side. "You see we got just a little air, but it does not take much to make the *Lynx* move. If this continues, we may come up to the *Pearl* by daylight. Now, go below and get something to eat, and then you can come up here and tell me more about your doings since you've been a castaway."

Harry gladly did as he was bid, and after having fortified the inner man, returned on to the quarter-deck.

"That native, whom you call Bogy, seems an intelligent fellow," said the lieutenant, when Harry returned.

"Yes, he is, and as good as gold. So is the one called Peko; these chaps only want taming to make good men, but you can't expect them to take to civilisation or Christianity when such vessels as the *Pearl* are cruising about, undoing all the good work that the missionaries do."

"No, of course, but I hope to have her this time; we have caught two such vessels within the last eighteen months. They give us a lot of bother. They're all very smart crafts, and unless you catch them whilst they have the natives aboard, you can't seize them very well on suspicion; although, if they think they are being watched very close, they generally have to do a little honest trading for a time, anyway."

All night long the breeze continued very light, occasionally dying quite away. It was a blessing for Jack that he did not know that help was so near at hand, or his torments would have been intensified each time the light breeze which blew the *Lynx* nearer and nearer to him died away, and the rippling water ceased to rush past her smooth sides.

Harry felt no inclination for further sleep. He

walked forward once or twice during the night to have a chat with Bogy. He found most of the natives sleeping peacefully, but Bogy and Peko were on the top-gallant forecastle with the look-out men, so that nothing was likely to escape the eye of one of them, were it ever so small a speck.

Bogy was in hope that they would overhaul the *Pearl* by daylight, but he too felt that they would probably be too late to save Jack's life, though he thought there was a chance of capturing the schooner, which if they did, would greatly help to set his mind at rest regarding his friends on his own island; for by the course the *Pearl* was taking when she was first sighted off Rollock Island, he thought it more than likely that she would touch at Bogy Island, and even if she did not succeed in kidnapping any of the inhabitants, she would most likely do them a great deal of harm, and cause loss of life by bombarding the village.

The night dragged on almost as slowly with Harry as it did with Jack, for both were filled with despair, one at his approaching fate, and the other lest they should be too late to render assistance, or even miss the chance altogether. The lieutenant did all that lay in his power to allay Harry's anxiety. The log was hove

several times during the night, and he made careful calculations as to the whereabouts both of his own vessel and that of the *Pearl*. Of course, if she had picked up a breeze he might be quite out of his reckoning, but if she had been becalmed or nearly since she had raided the island, he felt pretty sure they would not be far apart at daylight.

"I've allowed for currents and all that kind of thing, but of course I can't allow for wind, for if she has had any I can't tell what course she will take. It's no good being over-anxious, my lad; I daresay we'll sight her when the sun rises, and even if we're not in time to save your chum, we will at least rid these seas of another pest. Though I can't understand this man Hackett killing a man in cold blood, villain though he is! You must remember, according to your own yarn, that he had a certain amount of provocation before, but Rollock is not likely to be cantankerous when he's all alone, and without any natives to defend from brutal treatment."

"I don't know," answered Harry meditatively, "if they bully him he'll go for them, if he's able. But I won't bother you any more about it; if we fall in with her we do, and if not, well, it can't be helped."

As dawn began to break, a thin sea mist rose which soon enveloped the *Lynx*.

"Everything seems to work against us," said Harry irritably; "as soon as the night goes, we get into this mist as thick as a hedge."

"It will not last long," said the lieutenant. "I dare say up aloft it is quite clear. I will send a couple of hands up to have a look round."

The men who were sent had barely got in the cross-trees, before one of them came sliding down the back-stays, and the next moment was on the quarter-deck.

"There's a schooner lying becalmed not half a mile to the west'ard, sir," he said; "she looks like the *Pearl*. We didn't sing out, sir, for we was feared that the sound might carry."

"I must have a look," said Harry, as he sprang into the rigging and made his way into the main cross-trees. Yes, there sure enough was the *Pearl*. He had not time to scrutinise closely, but he was sure he had not mistaken the vessel.

A man was at once sent aloft with a glass. The crew were called to quarters, and the *Lynx* cleared for action. The bow gun was loaded, the port cutter made ready, and a boarding party got into her. They were just about to lower her away when a breeze swept across

the ocean, the sails of the *Lynx* filled, and she plunged forward. At the same moment the mist rolled away, the sun shone forth, and the *Pearl* was in full view.

"My God! there he is! They're hanging him!"

With the greatest promptitude the bow gun was laid. Harry was perfectly petrified at the sight of his chum hanging. He could not speak or move, but stood gazing with horror at the awful scene. The next instant there was a bang, a curl of white smoke blew to leeward, and the figure which had been dangling in the air from the schooner's peak was no longer there.

'Splendid shot!' roared the lieutenant. "We shot the gaff away; we'll save him yet. Port cutter away and pick him up."

In a moment the boat was lowered, but they had not time to shove off from the vessel's side when there was a bang and a crash, and the jib-boom went by the board, shot clean through close off to the bowsprit.

Before any hands could clear away the wreck, the weight of the boom towing alongside threw the *Lynx* up into the wind. In the meantime the *Pearl*, minus her mainsail, was running before the wind, which was momen-

tarily increasing. A few shots were fired after her, with the promptitude for which men-of-war's men are so justly renowned, and which astonished Harry, but apparently without effect. The boom was soon inboard, the loose stays cast adrift from the spar and set up round the forward capstan, and in an incredibly short space of time the *Lynx* was giving chase, first of all picking up the boat which had pulled alongside, and to Harry's, and, in fact, to everybody's joy, containing the body of Jack Rollock.

"Do the best you can for your chum," said the lieutenant, taking a hasty look at Jack. "He's not dead yet, anyway. I must look after the vessel, and I warrant the *Pearl* shall be our prize before sundown."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE "PEARL" CAPTURED

WHILST all hands worked hard at repairing the *Lynx's* damage, the doctor, Harry, and two stewards did their best to bring back what little life there was left in Jack Rollock's poor, half-hanged, half-drowned body. They had a long and tedious job, but at last were rewarded for their exertions by seeing him open his eyes and gaze around. Then putting his hands to his throat, he shuddered, again closed his eyes, and apparently went to sleep.

By this time the *Lynx* had made her damage good, and was in full chase of the *Pearl*, which was about two miles ahead, spreading every stitch of canvas she could possibly crowd on, and both she and the *Lynx* flew before the strong breeze, skimming through the lively water like birds.

Harry having satisfied himself that Jack was now in a fair way to recover, and having taken counsel with the doctor, they decided to let

him sleep as long as he would, leaving one of the ship's boys to watch him, and to let them know should he awake or show any symptoms of distress in his sleep.

"Where was this reef with the wreck on it?" asked the lieutenant; "could you show me its whereabouts on the chart?"

"I think I could, if you can show me exactly where Rollock Island is."

"Oh! I can do that within a little; come into the cabin."

The lieutenant spread out the chart. "Here's where Rollock Island ought to be within an ace, judging from your description. Now, where's the reef?"

"Due east about thirty or forty miles."

"Well, in that case, if we continue much longer on this course, we'll be on it, or rather the *Pearl* will be. Can you see the wreck any distance?"

"No, not since she was carried by the big wave into the lagoon. You can see her, of course, but not till you are within about a mile of her, or even less when in a boat."

"Well, I should like to see that rascal grounded, but we shall have to be very careful

ourselves, if we don't manage to overhaul her before dark. We're only gaining on her very slowly."

It wanted but an hour to sunset, and the *Pearl* was still more than a mile in the van, and there seemed but little hope of overhauling her before dark.

"I'll try a shot or two presently, only it seems rather a waste of ammunition, as we're not likely to do her much harm at this range. Hallo! what's up with her?"

The *Pearl* suddenly shot up into the wind. She, however, soon filled, and stood away on the starboard tack.

"Now we've got her," shouted the lieutenant.

Quick as the *Pearl* had been, yet the time she lost had enabled the *Lynx* to get within easy range. Bang! went a gun; then another!

"Wing her, lads. Never mind her hull; knock the sticks out of her."

Bang! bang!

"Hurrah!" yelled the crew, as they saw the shot had taken effect, for over the side went the *Pearl's* foremast.

"Another one or two for her main," shouted the lieutenant.

Bang! bang! Down came the main.

Three hearty British cheers rent the air, and must have reached the enemy, for they answered them by a vigorous fire.

"Port cutter away!"

In an instant a boat was lowered. Harry jumped into her, and was pulled rapidly towards the disabled *Pearl*.

Under a heavy fire they pulled on. A storm of bullets was flying over their heads, but the boats were not struck.

"They are desperate," said a seaman coolly; "they know their skin ain't worth much when once we gets aboard."

In a few minutes the boats were alongside the *Pearl*, and like monkeys the gallant blue-jackets climbed aboard. Harry, armed with a cutlass and pistol, was not behind the rest, and the moment after gaining the deck he found himself furiously attacked. He just had time to recognise his opponent as Hackett.

"Surrender!" he yelled.

Hackett's answer was to draw his revolver and take aim.

Quick as lightning Harry swung his cutlass round his head, and with all his force struck

Hackett on the uplifted arm. At the same moment he saw a flash and felt a sharp twinge of pain in the shoulder, and before he could recover from this he received a blow on the back of the head which felled him to the deck ; and though the noise of battle continued for some minutes, he heard it not, for he lay stunned and bleeding amongst half-a-dozen others in a similar, or even much worse plight.

When he came to, he heard ringing cheers from the lusty throats of the British seamen. He felt rather dazed, but staggered to his feet. It was growing dark, but he could see that the *Lynx's* crew were in possession of the *Pearl*.

The fighting was all over, and the blue-jackets were securing their prisoners, and, transferring them to the boat, pulled them aboard the *Lynx*, which lay hove to not far off.

Another party were going round attending to the wounded.

"Here, sonny," said a seaman, "you've got a nasty knock. You must come with me and see the doctor as is forrard." Harry certainly felt very faint, and was bleeding rather freely, but he thought little of his wounds—his one anxiety was to find out how Hackett had fared.

"I doesn't know the gentleman as you is alluding to by sight," answered the seaman to his anxious inquiry, "but there is a mighty ugly cadaverous-looking customer a-lying aft. He don't take much lashing to hold him down, as he's got a bruise as he won't get over, in my opinion."

"Let me see him, and I'll tell you if it's the man."

The seaman gave Harry his arm, and led him aft to where the wounded man was lying.

"That's him!" cried Harry, as he recognised Hackett, though his clothes were torn and he was covered with blood.

"Ah, Tom Hackett," he exclaimed, "you would have hung your old school-fellow, Jack Rollock, would you? But you didn't succeed, and now you must pay the penalty."

Hackett said nothing, but only groaned and glared with rage.

"I'll leave you now; you'll be in good safe keeping," said Harry, as he caught hold of the seaman's arm, for a sudden wave of faintness came over him from loss of blood.

"Here, you had better get the doctor to bind up them wounds, or you'll be a stiff 'un afore long," said the seaman, at the same time catch-

ing hold of Harry and leading him along to where the doctor was busy at work.

"Here's a case as wants attending to," said the man, depositing Harry on the main hatch.

The doctor made a hasty examination. "Not much hurt, my lad—a bullet graze on the shoulder, and a slight scalp wound; you'll soon be well."

The prisoners having been all taken aboard the *Lynx*, as well as all the wounded that could be safely moved, a strong party were soon at work in boats to tow the *Pearl* into the lagoon of Skeleton Reef, there to refit. It was the sight of this reef that had so suddenly made the *Pearl* haul her wind and go about, and which had practically led to her capture. Bogy acted as pilot, and very soon an opening in the reef was found large enough to admit the schooner, and shortly after the moon rose the *Pearl* was safely brought to an anchor in the calm water of the lagoon of Skeleton Reef.

All night long the men worked hard, rigging up jury-masts. Harry went aboard the *Lynx*, where he found Jack walking about, feeling no ill effects from his hanging and drowning, except a slight pain in his throat, and a certain amount of weakness.

The meeting of the chums can better be imagined than described. Jack was very anxious to see Hackett, and the lieutenant promised him that he should go aboard the *Pearl* at daylight, when he hoped she would be ready for sea, and they would be able to take her across to Rollock Island.

During the night the *Lynx* stood off and on. There was no danger of her going ashore, as the seas breaking on the reef were plainly visible in the bright moonlight.

Neither of the boys slept. They were far too excited. Harry, having had his wounds dressed, almost forgot about them, so little did they pain him. True, he had a bit of a headache, and was rather stiff in the shoulder, but as he had no work to do this did not matter much. The loss amongst the *Lynx's* crew was five wounded, and that of the *Pearl* two killed and seven wounded, one desperately, and that was Hackett. The two killed were the captain and the mate.

"How is the brute that acted as my jailer? I suppose he has escaped without injury," said Jack.

"Let's come and look at the prisoners, and then we might pick out the man who was going

to release you ; we'll rouse the doctor out, he seems a good sort."

Jack and Harry made their way down forward. The prisoners who were not wounded were lying in the 'tween deck securely ironed ; the others were tethered together by the wrists, though not so tightly as to hurt them. Jack soon discovered his would-be deliverer, and at once asked the lieutenant if he might be set free.

"Certainly," said the lieutenant, when he had heard the yarn, "I'll release him in the morning, but he must remain with the rest for to-night. It won't do him any particular harm, and he deserves some punishment for being aboard such a craft."

For hours our heroes paced the deck, making plans for the future.

"I say, Harry, it seems almost too good to be true, to think that we are in measurable distance of getting home again ; we ought to be very thankful."

"I am, Jack, for we've only saved ourselves by the skin of our teeth. Just fancy, you actually having been strung up. It must have been an awfully strange sensation. I know I should take it out of that beast Hackett now that he's in your power"

"No, Harry, if I can do him a good turn I will, for when I thought I was bound to die I tried hard to forgive him, and I'm sure, now that God has spared me, I'm not going to let any bitter feeling take possession of me. It would be a most unthankful and wicked thing to do."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, but still he doesn't deserve any pity."

"I don't think there's much chance of his recovering from his wounds. I shall go aboard the *Pearl* at daylight and have a talk with him. After all, he is an old school-fellow of mine, blackguard though he has turned out to be."

When the sun rose, the breeze, which had been blowing fresh all the night, died away, and the *Lynx* lay becalmed about a mile off the reef.

"Why, look, Jack, they've nearly finished rigging the *Pearl* already. These blue-jackets are smart, and no mistake; they had better turn to and refit the old wreck, and then we'll have two prizes."

"Skeleton Reef looks like a dock, now there's the wreck and the schooner at anchor. If he only took the *Lynx* into the lagoon, any ship coming along would think there was a big harbour instead of only a small uninhabited atoll."

CHAPTER XXIV

TOM HACKETT'S END

THE boys made a hasty breakfast, and, accompanied by the lieutenant and the doctor, jumped into a boat and were pulled to the *Pearl*. It is difficult to describe Jack Rollock's feelings as he climbed aboard and stood on the main hatch, the place where he had spent that terrible night, his last night in this world, as it had appeared to him then. He was not afraid to kneel down and thank God for his timely deliverance, though there were a crowd of rough seamen standing round.

"That's right," said the lieutenant, who had been an onlooker. "A man or boy who will do that has plenty of grit in him. Do you see, men," he added, addressing some of the blue-jackets who were standing near, "the action of this lad requires more pluck than boarding any vessel against any odds."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Jack, "but do dry up. I should be an awful cur if I wasn't

thankful for my deliverance, and didn't show it. I wasn't ashamed to ask for help when things seemed hopeless, so I'm not ashamed to acknowledge it, now that it has come. But I must now go aft and see Hackett. Where is he?

"In his bunk in the cabin," said the doctor. "Come along and I'll introduce you."

"Is he bad, doctor?"

"Yes, he's been pretty severely mauled. I'm afraid he'll never recover, so we'll miss the chance of hanging him, which he richly deserves."

Neither Jack nor Harry had ever been down in the *Pearl's* cabin before, and they were both rather surprised to find what a comfortable place it was. Though small, it was well lighted, and was really artistically decorated.

"You'll find him in there," said the doctor, pointing to a closed door of a state-room right aft. "There's not much room, so you had better go in one at a time, and don't stop long, unless you want to kill him right off."

Jack went in first. The wounded man was lying in his bunk, his head swathed in surgical bandages.

"Hackett," said Jack softly.

There was no answer, and Jack drew nearer to the bunk, when he became aware that the sick man was gazing at him, his eyes almost darting out of his head with terror, his whole form trembling as if he were suffering from a fit of ague.

"Hackett, don't you know me?" said Jack kindly.

"Leave me," said the poor trembling creature weakly. "Leave me, in mercy. Have you come to torment me before I'm dead?"

The word mercy sounded strangely on such a man's lips; Jack for a moment thought he must be delirious, so frightful was the gaze that he fixed upon him. Suddenly he remembered.

"Why, of course, he thinks I'm dead! What a fool I am! I must tell him."

"Hackett, I'm all right, sound in wind and limb. Did you think I was dead? Cheer up! you didn't kill me."

These words were no good, for Hackett still kept his two bright eyes steadily fixed on what he thought was an apparition; the frightful glare in them caused Jack to shrink back in horror.

"No! Rot," he mused to himself. "I've

nearly frightened him out of his senses. I must go up and touch him—that will show him I'm alive."

He advanced towards the bunk. "Hackett," he said, stretching out his hand, "I'm not dead!"

The wounded man, who had shrunk to the farther corner of his bunk, suddenly uttered a piercing yell, and lay back insensible—breathing heavily, his eyes still wide open, and with the same terrified look of horror in them.

The yell brought the doctor running into the berth.

"Hallo, youngster! what have you done?"

"He thinks I'm a ghost," answered Jack; "for goodness' sake, tell him I'm not. Look at his eyes; arn't they awful?"

"I think you've about done for him. You had better go on deck, and let me see if I can't bring him to."

"Well, give me a call if he comes round," said Jack, as he departed from the bunk, "and do your best for him, doctor—I should hate to think that I had frightened him to death."

"It wouldn't be more than he deserves, but I'll try and keep his rascally life in him a bit longer, if you wish it."

Jack found Harry in the cabin anxiously waiting for information as to what had happened. "I heard his ghastly yell," he said; "what was it all about?"

"Why, I suppose he thought he had hanged me, and when I turned up it naturally gave him a shock. My word! he did look scared. I only hope he won't die. If he came to, he might repent; what an awful life he must have led, poor chap! I feel sure he must have been rather mad, or he wouldn't have been such a beast."

"You take a very merciful view of him, Jack, considering he twice tried to hang you, and the last time practically succeeded."

"Well, you see, Harry, I've been too near the grave myself to bear any one any malice. I feel I ought to be dead now, instead of alive and well, and yarning to you."

In about half-an-hour's time the doctor came on deck.

"How is he?" inquired both boys simultaneously.

"I've got him round, but he won't last long," said the doctor; "I've satisfied him that you weren't a ghost, and now he's as anxious to see

you as he was to get rid of you. Will you go and see him?"

"Yes, rather! Like a shot, if you don't think it will send him off again."

"No, he's quite calm, so down you go."

Jack made his way down the companion ladder, followed by Harry, who remained in the cabin whilst his chum pushed open the door of the state-room and entered.

"Hackett, don't be alarmed. It's only me, Jack Rollock," feeling himself full of dread lest he should again encounter those fearful eyes.

"Come near me, Rollock," said Hackett feebly, "that is, if you don't mind," he continued after a pause. "I'm dying, Rollock, so don't be hard on me."

"All right, old chap," said Jack, not knowing what to say, and going alongside the bunk. "Cheer up! you may get well yet."

"No, never, I'm done for; but what makes you speak kindly to me? I did my best to kill you. I thought I had."

"I forgive you, Hackett—now ask God to, and He will."

"You may, Jack, but He never will."

"Rot! Tom," said Jack, taking his hand; "if

I, a miserable wicked creature, can, I'm sure He can, and will if you ask Him."

"How can I ask Him? Will you? Oh! do, I implore you."

"I will, but you must too."

Here a strange scene took place. The executed consoling the executioner in his last extremity. We will not go into details of that painful incident, but in less than an hour, the hard cruel lines on Hackett's face had lost their cynical harshness, and he lay breathing heavily, his hand clasped in that of Jack's. Nothing had been said for some time, when the dying man suddenly roused himself up, and asked that the lieutenant and doctor might be sent for. Jack tried to release his hand in order that he might go and call them, but Hackett said, "No, don't leave me. Sing out, they will hear you."

Jack shouted for Harry, who was still in the cabin, and who promptly delivered the message.

"Well, I'm dished!" exclaimed the doctor, when he entered the berth accompanied by the lieutenant. "One would think you two were fast friends instead of sworn enemies. Who wants us?"

"I do," answered Hackett feebly; "will you write something for me?"

"A confession?" grunted the doctor. "You had better take it down, sir," he said, turning to the lieutenant, who was standing somewhat in the background.

"All right, are there any writing materials about?"

Hackett pointed to a drawer. "In there," he said, "you will find everything."

"All right, here we are. Now then, what is it you want me to put down?"

The wounded man dictated the following, amid many pauses and hard fights for breath, for the spark of life was fast on the wane, though he remained perfectly sensible.

"I, Thomas Hackett, having committed nearly every kind of sin, die penitent. I have twice tried to murder my old school-fellow, Jack Rollock. I can make no amends. I only ask his forgiveness, and I leave him this schooner *Pearl*, which is my own property, bought with my own money, by which I came honestly, before I took up with this accursed trade."

He was too weak to sign his name, but made a mark which the lieutenant and doctor witnessed.

They then withdrew, leaving Jack alone with his would-be murderer. By mid-day all was over, Hackett's soul had left the body, and gone to render an account of its stewardship. He died quietly, still holding Jack Rollock's hand, and as far as could be seen really penitent.

For a few minutes Jack remained in silent prayer, then detaching the cold dead hand from his, went on deck and told the doctor.

"The only thing I can say," said that worthy, "is, that you treated him a great deal better than he treated you, so you've got something to be thankful for. Now the lieutenant wants to speak to you—there he is, standing by the main hatch."

"You want to speak to me, sir?" said Jack, going up to him.

"Yes, I do. I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid that, in spite of the gift that Hackett made to you of the schooner, you won't be allowed to have her. It's contrary to the rules of her Majesty's navy. You see, having fired on us, she will have to be confiscated and sold, and the money she fetches will be divided as prize-money amongst the crew."

"Oh! I don't want her," answered Jack; "I

shouldn't know what to do with her if I had her ; but I have a good cargo of copra on my island, and if you will help me to get that to some place where I can sell it, I shall be happy enough."

"Well, I'll see what can be done. I'll render you every assistance in my power, so the sooner we get across to your island the better. The schooner will be quite ready for sea by this evening, and we can fetch across there by daylight."

Just before sundown the *Pearl* got under way. As soon as she was in open water, the body of Tom Hackett was brought on deck and consigned to the peaceful depths.

After which the two boys went and stood aft on the wheel grating, and peered through the gathering gloom of evening, until Skeleton Reef and the lonely wreck were lost to view in the darkness of night, and the ever-growing distance.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

WHEN morning broke Rollock Island was in full view, and in less than an hour both the *Lynx* and the *Pearl* were safely at anchor in the lagoon.

The lieutenant was so pleased with having captured the *Pearl* that he granted the men a day's liberty ashore. Bogy and Peko busied themselves in preparing a meal for the visitors. Jack and Harry had grown tired of such viands as the island provided, and decided to have their food aboard, though the fruit and nuts were a treat to the sailors.

On the following day the *Pearl* was got ready to receive her cargo of copra, and the *Lynx's* boats were soon busy transferring it from the island to the schooner's hold.

The prisoners were taken ashore every morning under a strong guard in order to give them exercise. The lieutenant had decided to accompany the *Pearl* to New Zealand, and then to turn the prisoners over to the shore authorities to be dealt with. The *Lynx* herself

was in need of certain repairs, and he was glad to be able to take a prize back with him.

A week from the day on which Jack had been so miraculously rescued from hanging, the two vessels got under way. Bogy, Peko, and the other natives were left on Rollock Island, and received, as a reward for their fidelity, a handsome present of European goods, quantities of which had been found aboard the *Pearl*. Jack and Harry took many affectionate adieus of their dusky companions.

Jack wrote Bogy a long testimonial, so that should he again fall in with honest Englishmen, he would be sure to receive a warm welcome from them, for having so gallantly stuck to their countrymen through so many dangers. With the amount of goods left them, he and his companions would be able to do a brisk trade with the neighbouring islands, and the boys promised to send a vessel to visit them, so that they might continue to trade.

A sufficient crew was put aboard the *Pearl*, and the boys, having had their last swim in the lagoon, climbed aboard, and the vessels got under way. Rollock Island, with all its associations, was soon nothing but a remembrance to them.

With favouring winds, the vessels sped on

their way, and in eight days' time arrived in Auckland Harbour.

It seemed strange at first to the boys to be again amongst their own countrymen, to whom they had for so many months been strangers.

As soon as the vessels had anchored, the prisoners, with the exception of the one who had been prepared to risk his life to release Jack, were lodged in jail.

The boys had no difficulty in selling their cargo of copra, and with pockets well lined took steamer to Port Lyttelton.

It was with strange feelings that they came in sight of Banks Peninsula, and stood up towards the harbour of Lyttelton.

"There you are, Harry! There's Quarantine Island," said Jack, as the wooden buildings of the station hove in sight; "we've been through some queer shifts since we last saw them. I for one never expected to see them again."

"Ah, well! you've been hanged, Jack; but I always had a lingering hope of coming back."

A boat rowed off from the shore, the steamer slackened down, and a harbour official climbed aboard.

Jack went up to him, and asked, by way of a joke, if the *White Rose* were still in harbour.

"She is, and she sails early next week," said the official.

"Harry," yelled Jack in a great state of excitement, "the *White Rose* is here! My word! we'll be able to go home in her—she must have been home and out again since we left her."

In a few minutes the steamer had come to an anchor, and our heroes, jumping into a boat, were pulled ashore.

"Now, then," said Jack, "we'll have a good feed at the hotel, and then go aboard. I say, won't the skipper be surprised to see us?"

"I expect he won't let us ashore again. We've got plenty of money. Let's take a passage home in a steamer."

"No, we had better rejoin our vessel—I want to complete my time, so as to pass my exam. for second mate, for I have no intention of knocking off the sea. You can go home as a passenger if you like."

"No, Jack, I will come with you, and I suppose it's better for us to go as sailors. I don't think much of passengers."

Having had a good square meal, they made their way down to the landing-stage, and calling a boat, pulled off to the *White Rose*.

Running up the gangway, the first person they came across was the mate.

"Good-morning, sir," said Jack, "we've come back."

The mate gazed at them for a moment with a bewildered look, and then articulated something which was more forcible than was his wont.

"Yes, sir, we've come back," continued Jack; "but we've unfortunately lost the boat."

It was some time before the mate could get over his astonishment. The other apprentices crowded around the boys in great excitement, but they had no time to tell them any yarn as to their wanderings, before they were sent for by the skipper, who was in the cabin.

Jack gave a hasty explanation of their adventures.

"Well, boys," said the captain, "you see what comes of disobedience."

"Yes, sir," chimed in the mate, "and they've lost the boat."

"Ah, to be sure! Well, you'll have to settle that with the owners when you get home. Now you can go into the apprentices' berth. I'm glad you've come back, for we're very short-handed, and it's hard to get men now. We sail next Monday. You may thank your

stars that you found the vessel here, for you'll get a free passage home."

"And will have to work for it, sir," said Harry.

"I should rather think you would! You've had a good spell doing nothing amongst those lazy South Sea Islanders. Now, away you go."

In a little over three months the *White Rose* arrived in the Thames. She had a good passage, save for a bit of a dressing in rounding the Horn. Our heroes took leave of each other outside the dock gates, first having made up their minds that they would apply for leave to be shipmates on the next voyage.

When Jack again found himself standing on the doorstep of his mother's house, he did not hesitate to enter as he had done in the morning when he had run away from St. Chad's; and in a few moments the mother was clasping in her arms the son whom she for months had mourned as dead.

As Jack lay down to sleep that night in a cosy bed, he wandered back in his dreams to the far Pacific, and the many adventures he had met with in the vicinity of Skeleton Reef.

